

Children and Development in Vietnam.

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Foreword

This co-research project between Irewoc (the Netherlands) and Youth Research Institute aims to investigate the live, work and education of children in three areas in Vietnam has been financed by Plan International.

The report forms part of a bigger study in six countries (Vietnam, India, Burkina Faso, Tanzania, Bolivia and Nicaragua) on the issue of child participation in development.

Many types of development intervention in the past have been top-down, and have assumed that an appropriate mix of vision, resources and commitment was sufficient to bring about change among the target population. Such a strategy proceeded in a hierarchical fashion, and despite good intentions, insufficiently relied on the active participation of the target groups for whom the intervention was intended. In the best of cases, the premise was that participation was triggered by the development project. Their participatory role of any specific section such as women or children all too often was only recognised at the point of executing the plans.

The idea of participation in development has a long history, and has been subscribed to in various forms. In recent years, 'agency' has propped up as a new way of referring to the active involvement from below.

In comparison with participation, which can have various stages short of active involvement at the planning and decision making stage, agency actually involves a more active role of the target group. It starts from the assumption that the people targeted by the intervention are actually agents themselves, continuously acting in and reacting to circumstances. In a world full of changes, challenges and choices, they are the most active players. In fact, they are change agents in a dynamic process.

Where do children fit in this understanding? Is the child as active a change agent as adults are thought to be? It is a question fraught with complexities. In recent debates, a tendency has arisen to idealise the autonomy of the latter child, and to conceive it as a reservoir of resources to be tapped in a child-centred policy. In the focus on children as active participants, care should be taken also to delineate the structural constraints under which children (and adults) have to live their lives. Care should also be taken to differentiate between the duties towards children (and the demands put on children) and the rights that children can claim to have.

Any community has social practices into which its members are socially inducted from an early age on. Such behaviour is adopted by young children who, while transgressing the limits all the time, are made to realise how far their personal interpretation of the rules can go. Local standards are not unchangeable. Particularly under the impact of development, modernisation, commercialisation and spatial integration, changes in ideas, norms and attitudes have become even more dynamic. Changes that are adopted by a community will be an important

basis for the child to carry it forward, and in a sense to bring the seeds of change to fruition.

Before one can comment on the impact of external change agencies, specifically child-focussed agencies, and the way in which children themselves have a proactive role to play, one needs what children themselves think and what they can contribute. One needs to understand how the child socialises and at the same time actively contributes to the family and the social environment. One also needs to understand how material poverty, mental deprivation and disempowerment help to shape resilience and defiance, but also anger, distrust and marginalisation.

The perception of the child as a self-conscious actor and as a bearer of rights is relatively new. According to the view underlying the pedagogy of liberation, which witnessed a short upsurge in the western countries in the 1970s, children themselves are causative agents. If they are allowed to develop of their own accord, they will produce a better society (more freedom and more justice). Children as agents can also be regarded as the means by which an effect or result is produced (an agent of change). There is the need to explore this field and gain better insight in the potential of children under different circumstances. *Such a view contrasts with the more traditional view of the child as the recipient of knowledge and the recipient of rights.*

The research program has been sponsored by PLAN International in the Netherlands. Being a child focused development organisation, PLAN is devoted to realise lasting improvements in the quality of life of deprived children all over the world. PLAN places children in the centre of development processes while the Convention on the Rights of the Child is placed within the heart of its organisation. In this way, it aims to contribute to realising universal rights of children for and by children.

Children have rights. The need for care, access to education and to health are some of the rights high on their priority list. They also like to be respected and to valued for what they are and what they think. By empowering children to make people listen to them, children can play a more *an active role* in their community. Against this background, Foster Parents Plan Nederland is interested in gaining more insight in ways and means to tap the potential of children as agents in the process of change in different settings.

The Amsterdam Foundation for *International Research on the Exploitation of Working Children* (IREWOC) was established in 1991 in order to generate more research on child labour, and to raise awareness and motivate action around this complex issue. In order to monitor and understand child labour situations, it is necessary to look at the wider context of the living conditions of children and their families. The focus is on the situation of children living in adverse conditions. It is important to study the changing approach on child labour and the impact of the process of globalisation on changes in the condition of children.

Of increasing interest in the discussion on street children, child labour and children in unfavourable circumstances in general is the perception of the working child itself. Research needs to be undertaken on the social and cultural parameters

of child labour and particularly how the child conceives the work, the role in the family context, the (missed opportunities of) education and the challenges of the future.

It is also important to study the economic, social, political and intellectual consequences of the process of globalisation and neo-liberal policy-shifts in the world. The impact has possibly led to more disequilibrium and chaos than was hitherto the case. Especially the impact on the poor people in the world should be taken as a central concern, for they, and their children, remain the majority in the world. Policies should mainly have them in focus.

I hope this report will be useful, in the first instance for the national child-focussed organisations, and shall be interested in providing an improved version for publication.

The work of data gathering, analysing and writing the report has been done by the colleagues of the Democratic Research Institute in Hanoi. I owe great respect to professor Li The Qui and her team for the way they have conducted the job and have provided us with an excellent report.

I am also absolutely grateful to Plan Nederland. It is very unusual for NGOs to financially support research which goes beyond the mere stage of monitoring and assessment of projects. Plan's involvement in the program is really exceptional. By doing so the organisation has show vision and courage. I hope the results are appropriate to the expectations.

Kristoffel Lieten,

Irewoc, April 2003

Introduction

Protection and care for children are always considered as important interventions in the development strategies of each nation. Any country that intends to be developed and progressive must care for the young generation because of the 'children today, the world tomorrow'. Experience has shown that a child's future almost depends on the child's family and community, especially in education, work and living. Therefore, research on children is impossible if it is separated from research into the family and community.

Vietnam, a less-developed agricultural country, has passed through a long period of war. The people's living standard has remained low and many families continue to live in poverty. The country after starting the *doi moi*, the socialist market economy, has achieved many significant changes. It, however, also resulted in the unequal development among areas such as: city and countryside, mountainous and plain areas.

The newly emerging levels of inequality have created profound differences between social groups and classes. Before the renovation, the northern areas were in the situation of 'equality in poverty'. Now, the popularity has shown that many rich people are richer and richer and becoming the middle class. In contrast, there are many poor people becoming poorer and poorer. In this general development, the rural and mountainous areas have been marked as the difficult areas where have a lot of poor people and are less developed than others.

The lives of children reflect the social stratification. Some children grew in the lap of luxury. They are protected and cared by their parents and relatives and gain abilities to study and develop their own talents. In contrast, some others were born in the poor families in bad situation. They do not receive any good condition to gain ordinary and healthy development. Poverty affects much in the lives of children. Every child (tre-em) is different in condition, sorrow and joy confidence from each other but they all have one common name: 'poor children' (tre-em ngheo). To research the real life, condition and children's ability to live in order to find efficient solution to provide them better condition is a quite pressing and meaningful matter to both science and reality. Consequently, project titled 'Children and Development' has been established.

According to the requirement of this project, three northern provinces have been chosen to carry out the comparative research. These provinces represent three different types of regions in Vietnam: urban, rural lowlands and the midland and mountainous areas: Phuc Xa precinct in Ba Dinh district (Ha Noi), La Son commune in Binh Luc district (Ha Nam province) and Quang Son commune in Dong Hy district (Thai Nguyen province).

Diverse methodologies, mainly sociological and anthropological, have been used. The researchers formulated household files, identifying poor households having children under 16. They sampled and made quantitative survey by using

questionnaires: 300 sheets of questionnaires were distributed to children and 150 sheets for households. The sheets were given equally to the project sites. The collected data were processed and analyzed by using program SPSS.

In addition to the quantitative research, at each site, the researchers also made in-depth qualitative personal interviews with 15 students and parents and 7 people who were provincial or social organization leader, school teacher, health worker, librarian, and staff of the cultural or childcare department. In this way, altogether, 66 people were interviewed. Interviews were also made with 3 groups at each site (1 group of boys, 1 group of girls and 1 group of parents). A total of 9 groups were interviewed.

In order to regularly and closely monitoring children's activities at school, in the family and community, the researchers came to live with them to keep diaries. At each site they keep 3 types of diary: a diary on school children who are involved in housework; a diary on school children who are working to earn a living; and a diary on children who already dropped out to make a living. A total of 9 diaries were kept.

The researchers also spent much time on collecting necessary information and data on the project sites. They include statistical data on socio-economic situation, land allocation and land use, income per capita, socio-cultural and ethnological characteristics, customs and practices, data on school and health facilities and relevant documents, materials and publications.

The research failed to explore children's own coping mechanisms and survival strategies. This shows that the research team, at least in part, still perceived children as helpless victims in need of protection, rather than as social actors in their own right. A cursory glance at children's responses to abuse, exploitation and mistreatment demonstrate that children frequently take the initiative to protect themselves. Child workers often form groups to protect and help each other in times of need. Children also use a variety of avoidance strategies and in extreme cases run away from home or from their employer. It is rare to find children who fight back against maltreatment, given the imbalances in physical strength and socio-economic power. Children own strategies offer points of departure for developing more effective approaches to address the rights of working children.

Chapter 1. An Outline of Development Indicators and Child Rights

The Socialist Republic of Vietnam lies almost in the centre of Southeast Asia with a long land borderline and a 3,260 km long coastline. In the shape of an S, it borders China to the north with 1,150 km borderline, Laos and Cambodia to the west with 1,650 km and 930 km of borderline, respectively. It looks out on the Pacific Ocean in the east and the south. The country covers an area of 331 thousand square kilometres, including the Truong Sa (Spratley) and Hoang Sa (Paracels) archipelagos on the East Sea. ¹ The distance from the northernmost to the southernmost point is 1,650 km; at its narrowest (in the central province of Quang Binh), the distance from the eastern border to the western border is only 50 km wide.

Vietnam has a diverse terrain comprising of mountains, rivers, highlands, plains and coast areas. Mountains cover three-fourths of its territory. The highest peaks are Fansipan (3,143m high) in Lao Kai province, and Putaleng (3,096m high) in Lai Chau province. There are 2,860 rivers of which the biggest are the Red River, which is 500 km long, and the Thai Binh River. Cuu Long (220 km) is the last stretch of the 4,220 km long Mekong River.

Vietnam lies in the tropical region, and is strongly affected by the Asian monsoon, particularly the northeasterly and southeasterly monsoons. As a result, Vietnam enjoys two different climatic regions. Southern Vietnam, which is affected by the southeasterly monsoon, is hot all the year round and has two seasons, the wet season from April to October, and the dry season from October to April. Northern Viet Nam experiences 4 seasons: spring season prolongs from March to May, summer from May to August, autumn from September to October and winter, from November to February. Tay Nguyen (in the Central Highlands), particularly Lam Dong province is cool all the year round. In the southern plain the temperature rarely falls to under 20°C, but in the northern plain, it is sometimes falls to under 5°C. While in the South, the temperature between months varies 2-3°C, in the North it varies up to 12°C. Humidity is high, often more than 85 %, due to much rain and steam evaporating from rivers, lakes, ponds and the sea.

Vietnam has a large population, about 78 million. The natural growth rate of the population during the recent years has fallen rapidly from 2.3 % in 1988 to 1.4 % in 1998. The sharp drop is a good indication of the success in the implementation of family planning during the last decade. The population is

¹ Some of the sources used for the general overview are: Vietnam Panorama-Statistical Publishing House, Hanoi, 1997; General Statistic in Vietnam, Hanoi, 2000.

unevenly distributed between different areas. Most of the people are concentrated in the Red River Delta (17 million), the Cuu Long (Me Kong) River Delta (16 million), and the eastern part of southern Vietnam (12 million). Inhabitants of these three regions, 27.1 % of the entire area, account for 58.51 % of the Vietnamese population. The urban population is lower than in many other countries. However, the rapid urbanization process over the last few years has turned some rural communes into urban wards and townships. As a result, the proportion of urban population has increased from 20.1 % of the total population in 1989 to 23.5 % in 1999.

The country is inhabited by 54 ethnic groups, of which the Kinh (Vietnamese) with 86.83 % of the total population are the majority. Ethnic minority groups live mainly in mountainous areas. The Tay and Thai groups (each group has about 1 million people) are the largest. They are followed by Muong, Hua, Khmer, Nung, H'Mong, Dao, Gia Rai, E De, Ba Na, Cao Lan and San Chi ethnic groups, each with a population of between 500,000 and 1 million. Each ethnic group has its own language, customs, practices and cultural characteristics. However, Vietnamese is the national language. Currently, one-third of the Vietnamese population is religious, adhering to one of the many religions practiced in Vietnam: Buddhism, Christianity, Protestantism, Islam and local religions such as Cao Dai, Hoa Hao, etc.

1.1. Socio-Economic Development in 1986-2000

The economic reform policy (doi moi) was initiated in 1986. It was meant to develop Viet Nam from a centrally planned economy to a market-oriented economy. The reform process had two major thrusts:

a considerable degree of market liberalization, and

an open door policy attracting foreign investments and development aid and exporting goods and services to the world market.

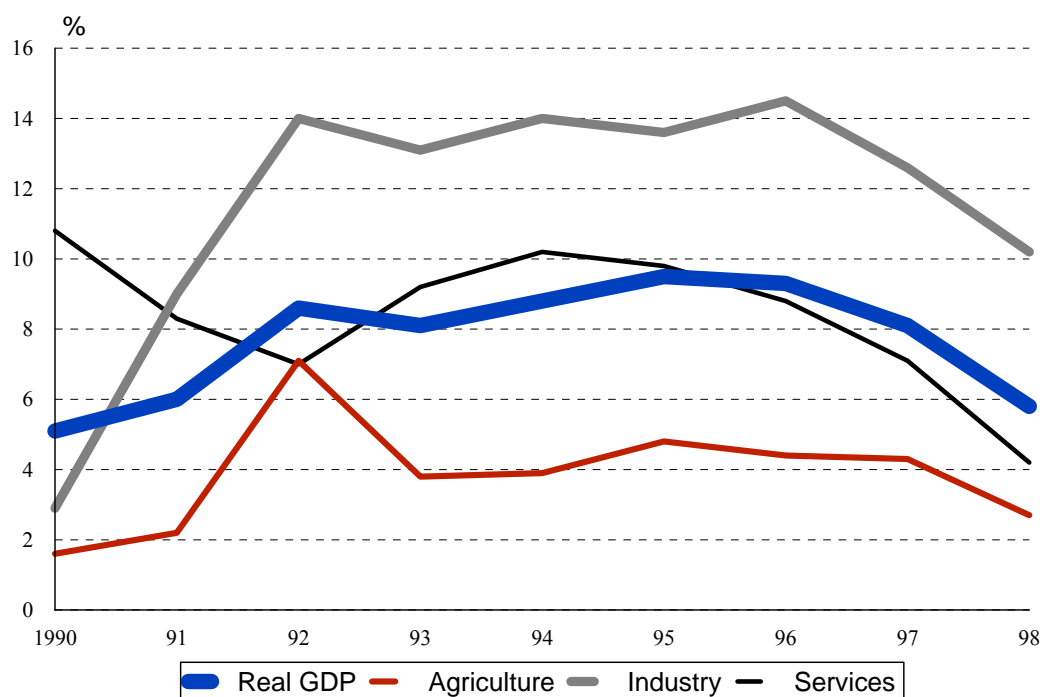
During the last 15 years in the implementation of doi moi, Viet Nam's socio-economic situation has experienced comprehensive and significant changes. Economic growth continuously remains high (see Figure 1). The average annual GDP growth in 1986-90 was 3,9 %; in the period 1991-95 it was 8,2 % and in 1996-2000, despite the crisis engulfing the rest of South-East Asia, it was still 7 %. At the end of 2000, GDP was nearly 400 US \$ per capita/year, more than double the level achieved in 1990.

After the introduction of doi moi, Vietnam initially had gone through a severe crisis in the mid-1980s, when inflation had gone up to 775 % in 1986; it then receded to 67,4 % in 1990, to 12,7 % in 1995 and to 0 % in 2000. In comparison with 1989, the number of employees in state and collective sectors reduced from 14.5 % and 55 % respectively to 9.8 % and 27 %. In contrast, the number of people working in individual and private sectors has increased from 29.3 % to 61.7 %.

Industrial production continuously increased at a growth rate above two digits. The average industrial growth rate in 1991-1995 was 13,7 %; in the period 1996-2000, it was 13,2 %. Agricultural production, animal husbandry, seafood production and forestry also developed considerably. In 2000, gross output of food crops was 35.6 million tons, double the output of 1986, following an annual increase of 5 %. As a result, Vietnam, which earlier was a food-importing country, now has ensured national food security, and even ranks as the second rice export country in the world, exporting around ten percent of its rice output.

Infrastructure in rural areas has been constructed, upgraded and renovated. By the end of 1999, 86 % of the communes had access to electricity, 96 % had health centers and 99 % had primary schools, of which 89 % were permanent or semi-permanent schools.

Economic Growth (1990-98)



Source: UN statistics.

In 1999, there were 50 million people above 15 years of age; 70.6 % of them were economically active, indicating that the growing number of people have been successfully absorbed in the labour process. It is estimated that every year in Vietnam, nearly 1 million young people enter work force. Therefore, the pressure on employment is very high. Although the unemployment rate has reduced (from 3.9 % in 1989 to 2.9 % in 2000), the number of unemployed people has continuously increased. In 2000, the number of unemployed people was 1.45

million, including 692,000 people in urban areas and 755,000 people in rural areas.

The share of industry in GDP increased from 22 % in 1980 to 35 % at the end of the century; the share of agriculture decreased from 41 % to around 24 %. Yet, the transition of the labour structure away from agriculture was very slow. In 1997, of the total workers there were 13 % workers in the industrial and construction sector, and 19 % in services. Labour working in agriculture, forestry and seafood industry accounted for 72 % in 1990 and 69 % in 1997, which a slow decline indeed, but only a small one.

Due to the successful economic development, people in general have enough food to eat and are able to save some resources or invest them in new houses or long-term consumption goods. The proportion of poor families has been gradually reduced. The food poverty rate in 1990 was 55 %. The rate was reduced to 20 % in 1993, 16.5 % in 1995, 15.0 % in 1997 and 13.3 % in 1999. The overall poverty rate in 1999 was 4.6 % in urban areas and 16.0 % in rural areas. The general poverty rate (non-food and food poverty) declined from 41.6 % in 1993 to 31.3 % in 1996. Along with economic growth, the average monthly income per capita has grown from year to year.

According to the above data in the whole country, income per capita per month has increased considerably. Income both in urban and in rural areas has increased. In the urban areas, the average income in 3 years (1996-99) increased every year by 16 %. According to the evaluation of 25,000 households in Living Standard Survey, conducted in 61 provinces, 74.8 % of households said that they had a better life compared with that in 1993; 19 % said that their living standard had hardly changed, and only 6.2 % said that their life had become worse.

During the 1996-99 period, income in urban areas increased every year by 6 %, but in rural areas, the growth rate was lower than the national level. GDP growth in Ha Noi and Ho Chi Minh City was double the national growth. These two cities generate one third of the national GDP, and their impressive growth has helped to widen the income gaps between rural and urban households. A World Bank Report (quoted in Unicef 2000a: 17-8) formulated the developments as follows:

These findings suggest that doi moi has benefited the rich more than the poor and urban more than rural populations. ... Furthermore, land reforms may further impoverish the rural poor as subsidised inputs and extension services are discontinued. ... Urbanisation is resulting in increased unemployment, the development of slum areas and increased homelessness, crime and social disorder. Economic liberalisation is likely to accelerate environmental degradation, including air and water pollution. Social sector reforms have removed traditional safety nets and instituted user fees for education, health care, child care and other basic services. These changes have undermined the ability of the poorest families to meet their children's basic needs, particularly in ethnic minority areas.

The figures in Table 1.1, however, also indicate, in line with the warning contained in the quote from the World Bank report, that the disparities between the urban and rural populations, which account for 23 and 77 per cent respectively of the total population, have grown. Whereas in 1992, rural incomes were 51 % of the urban incomes, in 1999 the average rural incomes per head were only 27 % of the urban levels.

Moreover, there are significant regional disparities. The Northern Highlands and the North Central coast regions are by far the poorest. These two regions account for 40 per cent of all the poor in Viet Nam although they are inhabited by just 29 per cent of the population (Unicef 2000a: 19).

The economic reforms have created more job opportunities and higher incomes in the cities, but also a widening gap between rich and poor. This tendency generates a stream of migrants into the city and create social dislocation:

Better transportation and communication systems to outlying provinces spread the word that opportunities exist in the cities. Families and children pour in. Children follow their friends and the golden road of rumours to a life on the streets (Plan International Vietnam: 6).

Table 1.1. Average monthly income per capita (x 1000 VND)

	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1999
Country average	92.09	119.01	168.11	206.10	226.70	295.00
Urban Areas	151.25	220.34	359.67	452.83	509.82	832.50
Rural Areas	77.39	94.49	141.14	172.50	187.89	225.00
Regional Subdivisions						
- Northwest & Northeast	66.74	85.85	132.36	160.65	173.76	210.00
- Red River Delta	91.32	109.28	163.34	201.18	223.30	280.30
- North Central Coast	63.58	81.72	113.00	160.21	174.95	212.40
- South Central Coast	71.12	109.61	144.72	176.03	194.66	252.80
- Central Highland	70.99	95.85	197.15	241.14	265.60	344.70
- Southeast	157.69	225.34	275.34	338.91	378.05	527.80
- Mekong River Delta	105.48	125.54	181.65	221.96	242.51	342.10

Data source: Vietnam Living Standard Survey I, 1992-1993 (General Statistical Office – GSO & Ministry of Plan and Investment - MPI); Wealth Survey 1993 (GSO); Multi-purpose Households Survey (GSO)

Despite the decline in poverty, economic development has also caused inequality between the rich and the poor to grow as the income of poor households and of most of households living in rural area has increased at a slower pace. The income per capita per month of the household living in the urban areas in 1994 was 2.5 times more than that of the household living in urban area; in 1996, it was 2.7 times more and in 1999 it was 3.7 times more. The disparity would probably be even higher if information on income was collected correctly.

In 1994, 1995, and 1996, GSO conducted Multi-purpose Household Surveys with 45.000 households. In 1999, GSO conducted another survey with 25.000 households representing the whole country, 7 regions. The upper income decile had an income 6.5 times more than the lowest decile in 1995; in 1997 it was 7.3 times higher and in 2000 it stood at 8.4 times (see table 1.2).

Table 1.2. Comparison of highest and lowest income decile

	1994	1995	1996	1997
Whole country	6.5	7.0	7.3	8.9
Urban	7.0	7.7	8.0	9.8
Rural	5.4	5.8	6.1	6.3
By region				
- Northwest and northeast	5.2	5.7	6.1	6.8
- Red River Delta	5.6	6.1	6.6	7.0
- North Central Coast	5.2	5.7	5.9	6.9
- South Central Coast	4.9	5.5	5.7	6.3
- Central Highland	10.1	12.7	12.8	12.9
- Southeast	7.4	7.6	7.9	10.3
- Mekong River Delta	6.1	6.4	6.4	7.9

According to the Human Development Report of the UNDP (2002), the income of the top quintile (20 % richest households) compared with the lowest quintile (20 % poorest households) at the end of the century was 5.6 times in Vietnam, 4.6 times in Indonesia, 6.0 times in Laos, 7.6 times in Thailand, 8.0 times in China, 9.8 times in the Philippines, and 12.4 times in Malaysia.

1.2 Education

The government of Vietnam considers that education and training is the first priority in national policy and the motivation for economic development. The State has introduced a number of policies to develop education and training. In general, material and technological basis and school network have been strengthened and developed. The proportion of capital investment for the National Program of Action for Children in the total amount for social programs also constantly increased.

The scale of education and training is constantly being enlarged, and although facing a number of difficulties, the school network has developed significantly, both in quality and in quantity. By the schooling year 1999-2000, there were 8,774 kindergartens with 84,217 classes, one third more than in the year 1986-1987. By 1999-2000, there were 24 thousand primary and secondary schools (an increase of 74 %) and 501 thousand classes (a rise of 47 % in comparison with 1986-1987).

There are a number of problems though. As part of the social and economic reforms, the cost of schooling, which earlier was free through grade 12, now involves some tuition fees and the purchase of textbooks. In addition, non-public schools have started.² On an average, the number of classrooms has increased with about 50,000 rooms annually, but the growth rate is not sufficient to neutralize the growth rate of the number of pupils.³ The quality of many classrooms is bad; at present there are 57 thousand classrooms (18 % share of total number of classrooms in the whole country) of a makeshift nature.

Together with the diversification of forms of education, the teacher contingent at all levels have been developed and strengthened in terms of quality and standards. Compared with 1986-87, in 1999-2000 there were 40 % more kindergarten teachers; the number of primary school teachers increased with 44 % to 351,273 teachers. However, the increase in the number of teachers has not met the demand. The shortage of teacher is most severe in the Mekong river delta and in the mountainous and remote areas. According to statistics, in 1999-2000, the nationwide shortage was 81 thousand teachers, out of which 19 thousand primary school teacher and 42 thousand secondary school teachers.

Compulsory education (grades 1 through 5) was introduced in 1991. There possibly was no real need to make education compulsory because at the time most children attended school: already around 95 % of both boys and girls. Regarding pre-school education, the number of children going to kindergartens is still on the rising trend. In the schooling year 1999-2000, 372,646 children went to nursery, and 2,2 million went to the kindergartens. The size of primary school pupils has now stabilized at 10 million, but there is a big increase of the secondary school pupils: 5,7 million in the lower and 2.0 in the upper secondary school, an increase of respectively 4.5 % and 6.5 % per year.

During the period 1986 - 2000, the ratio of repeating, dropout has decreased gradually while the percentage of pupils completing educational levels has risen at high pace (see Table 1.3).

At the primary education level: the repeat ratio decreased rapidly from 8.9 % in 1986 -87 to 3.1 % in 1999-2000, and the dropout ratio reduced from 10.3 % in 1986-87 to 3.1 % in 1999-2000. The percentage of completing educational level increased gradually over the years from 40.9 % in 1991-1992 to 71 % in 1999-

² They have developed since 1995-1996, and by now there are 618 schools and 18,477 classes, particularly at the higher levels. In the year 1999-2000, in comparison with 1986-87, the number of classes for primary education level increased by 34 %, while that of lower secondary education level increased by 70 %, and upper secondary education level rose 116 % .

³ Hence, the number of classes per room ratio in general for the whole country of 1.5 is not yet met. The phenomena of three class shifts per classroom per day still exist in the three education levels. In schooling year 1999-2000, there were 1,352 classrooms in which 3 shifts were held.

2000, thereby fulfilled the target objectives of respectively 5 %, 6 % and 70-80 % set forth by the National Action program. Children in especially difficult circumstances such as orphans, street children, handicapped, working children, ethnic-minority children and children of poor family, have little chance to go to school. Annually, about 1 million children from 6 - 14 years old do not go to school or drop out. A national action program is to be developed in the upcoming period to minimize the dropout and repeating of these children.

Table 1.3. Repeat and Drop-out Rate by Education Level (%)

	1986-87	1991-92	1996-97	1999-2000
Primary level				
Repeat ratio	8.87	8.86	4.36	3.07
Dropout ratio	10.30	12.35	6.14	4.50
Ratio of completing		40.80	72.10	71.00
Lower -secondary level				
Repeat ratio	5.31	8.53	2.31	1.80
Dropout ratio	13.11	21.23	8.08	8.50
Ratio of completing		39.82	64.97	69.36
Upper secondary level				
Repeat ratio	4.57	1.03	1.26	1.03
Dropout ratio	9.16	11.04	5.69	4.45
Ratio of completing		61.70	83.37	77.66

Source: General Statistical Office, Hanoi, 2000.

Based on the results of general census and housing held on 1st April 1999, in the whole country about 6.3 % of population can be considered illiterate. According to the Vietnam Committee for Protection and Care for Children (in 2000, in collaboration with General Statistical Office), the adult literacy rate, as calculated of the people 15 years old and over was 90.2 %. Around 5 % of the people between 20 and 50 years have never gone to school.⁴

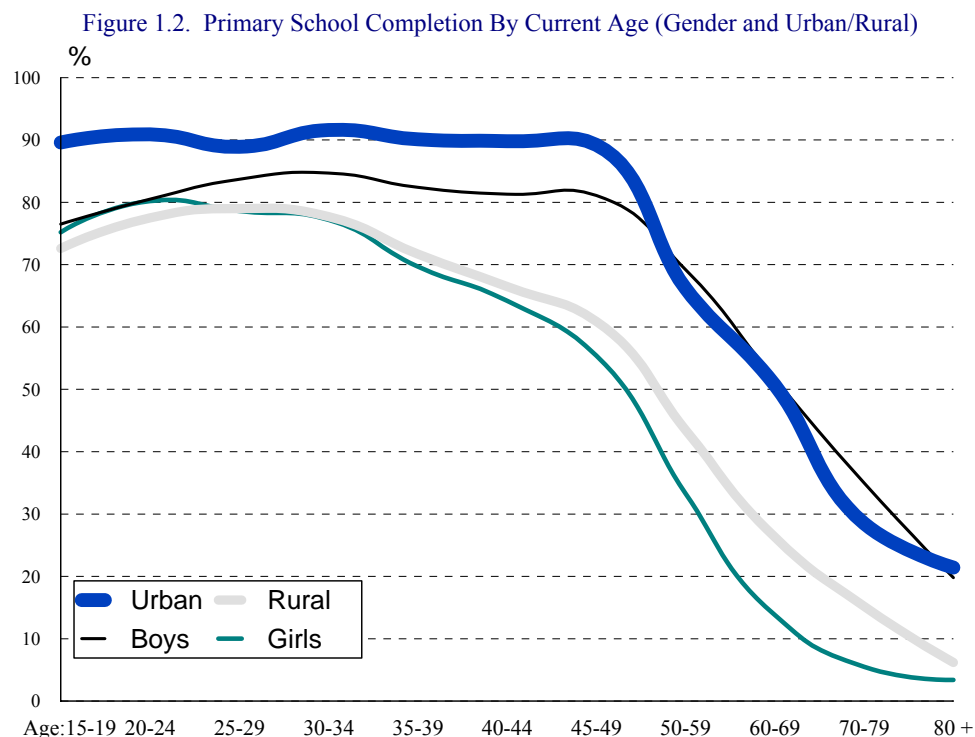
The adult literacy rate varies significantly by region (the highest in the Red River Delta with 95.6 %, and the lowest in the North-West with 72.4 %), and also between urban and rural areas (96.8 % and 87.8 % respectively). The male – female inequality was reported in each region, in both rural areas and urban areas, but with significant variations. In some areas the discrepancy was as low as 3.25 %; in other regions it was a high as 20 %. The highest inequality rate was in the

⁴ Under the illiteracy eradication program, people who are illiterate were urged to go to school. By the end of June 2000, more than 10 thousand communes in 597 districts had completed the primary education introduction and illiteracy eradication. Annually, about 220,000 to 280,000 people go to illiteracy eradication classes; and about 350,000 to 400,000 dropout children are again going to school.

North-East (11.6%), in the North-West (20.0 %) and in the Central Highlands (9.9 %), areas which are inhabited predominantly by ethnic minorities. The male – female inequality in rural areas was 8.9 % and in urban areas it was 2.9 %. In the 55 – 64 age group and upwards of 65, it was 16.4 % and 32.8 % respectively. It declined in younger age group and was only 1.6 % in the age group between 15 and 24, indicating that at the level of the children presently going to school gender differences have disappeared as far as basic education is concerned (Analysis of Results of the Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey II – Statistical Publishing House, Hanoi, 2000).

The long-term trends in educational achievement make clear that very substantial progress has been made in the spread of education in Viet Nam. The completion of primary school has risen from about 10 percent of the 80 years' old to around 50 percent of the 50 years' old and levels off at about 80 percent for those aged 35 and younger (see Figure 1.2).

There are still significant urban/rural differences though: whereas 95.2 % of the urban population was literate in 1999, it was only 89.8 % in the countryside. Of the 10 years' old children in the Red River Delta, 100 % was attending school in the mid-1990s; in the Northern Uplands, it was only 91 % and in the Central Highlands it was even as low as 81 %. In the latter areas, respectively only 67 % and 57 % of the 14 - 24 age group had finished the primary level (Inter-Censal Demographic Survey 1994).



Source: Inter-Census Demographic Survey 1994: 17

Globalization in science and technology development has opened new opportunity for developing human resources having high intellect, great capacity and adaptable to changes in technology and labour market demands caused by economic structure adjustment. The education and training should therefore provide the society with sound intellect and knowledge so as to facilitate the integration into the region and the world.

In 1999, there were 421 thousand students studying in 131 public universities and colleges and 16 non-public universities/colleges. Unlike in the universities, where there was a strong growth, the number of students in the intermediate training has decreased. In 1999, the number of this kind of training institutions were 246 compared with 192 units in 1986, but at the same time, there was a 14.7 % reduction in the number of teachers compared with 1986. In contrast, the number students went up to 143,398 students enrolled in 1999, an increase of 5.57 % compared with 1986. A similar development has taken place in the vocational and technical training schools.

It can thus be stated that during the period 1986 – 1999, education and training activities showed remarkable achievements and major imbalances. There is a surplus in university graduates but a shortfall of technical workers. The irrational training structure led to a waste of human resources, low training effectiveness

and utilization of labor. University/college graduates often find it difficult to get a job while industrial and production entities are critically short of skillful workers needed for modern equipment. This poses a pressing challenge to the education and training of human resources for the country, especially in the period of integration and development.

1.3 Health, Nutrition and Health Care

Since 1986, together with the general growth of the economy, the health sector has gained considerably achievement in protecting and caring people's health. The 2000 state expenditure on health care was 4.2 times more than in 1991, which means an effective yearly annual state expenditure increase with 17.7 %. The objectives have been to:

- ✓ Strengthening, upgrading and step by step modernizing health facilities at all levels along with directing activities to get effectiveness in health protection and care for people.
- ✓ Diversifying types of health services in accordance with the development of a market and multi-sector economy.
- ✓ Carrying out a host of national programs on protection and care for people's health, against diseases and infections.

Facilities for health examination and treatment have increased in both quantity and quality. By 1999, in the whole country, there were 833 hospitals (including medical research institutes with in-patient beds), an annual increase of 0.95 % compared with the figure of 1986. The rate of increase was still too low if compared with annual population growth rates (nearly 2 %), causing overload in health facilities.

During recent years, to overcome this situation, an effort has been made to diversify the various types of health services with regional polyclinics and a local health network of health centres. These commune-level health centres played an important role in preventive medical activities and in primary health care services for the people. In addition, commune/ward health centres also were places for the mobilization of community participation in health socialization. The health sector has established a network of more than 10 thousand health centres scattered from urban to rural areas as well as from plain lands to mountainous regions or islands.

Thanks to the efforts of the health sector in building health facilities, in 1997, according to the assessment of WHO, Vietnam had a better local health facilities system than many regional countries.

Table 1.4. Regional Comparison of Health Indicators

	Doctors (per 100,000)	Life Expectancy at Birth		Infant mortality rate		Fertility rate	
		1970-5	1999	1970-5	1999	1970-5	1999
Viet Nam	49	50.3	67.2	112	31	6.7	2.5
Laos	24	40.4	52.5	145	93	6.2	5.3
Indonesia	16	49.2	65.1	104	38	5.2	2.6
Philippines	123	58.1	68.6	60	31	6.0	3.6
Thailand	24	59.5	69.6	74	27	5.0	2.2

Source: UNDP, Human Development Report 2001.

By 1999, there were 37,119 doctors in the whole country, an increase of 4.9 % per year after 1986; the ratio of doctor over 10,000 people was 4.9 compared with 3.2 in 1986. This figure showed that the average number of people per one doctor has gone down from 3,077 people in 1986 to 2,056 in 1999. If the same calculation is applied to pharmacists, doctor assistants, nurses, midwives, the typical trend is similar, as is shown in table 1.5.

Table 1.5. Average number of people per doctor or pharmacist

	1986	1991	1996	1998	1999
Doctor/10,000 persons	3.23	3.83	4.31	4.34	4.86
Doctor or pharmacist/10,000 persons	10.42	11.02	10.60	10.69	11.57
Average number of people/doctor	3,077	2,609	2,360	2,285	2,056
Average number of people per doctor or pharmacist	959	907	960	936	864

Source: General Statistics in Vietnam, 2000

The health sector has paid due attention not only to the improvement of doctors but also the development of grassroots' health staff. There were doctor assistants, nurses and midwives at almost all commune/ward health centres, and doctors at some. However, the allocation of health staff, especially doctors, among central, provincial, district and commune levels was still a problem. According to current statistics, out of 37 thousand doctors in the whole country, 93 % concentrate at central, provincial and district levels, while commune/ward level receives the rest 7 %, which means that only 34 % of the health centres have a resident doctor. While there are 80 % out of total population living in rural areas, the proportion of doctors in these places is only 25 %.

Together with economic growth, people's health has apparently improved. Primary healthcare program have improved the health of women and children.

However, these efforts mainly focused on economically advantaged regions such as the Red River Delta, the eastern part of southern Vietnam and the Mekong River delta. Meanwhile, in remote, isolated and mountainous areas (Ha Giang, Bac Kan, Cao Bang, Son La, Kon Tum, Gia Lai, Binh Phuoc and Quang Tri provinces) conditions remain disadvantageous.

National programs for diseases and epidemic prevention, health protection and care have been carried out over the past years and have achieved remarkable results. The gross death rate has declined from 7.7 % in the period 1990-4 to 5.6 % in 1999. Infant mortality rate has fallen constantly, from 46 per thousand in the period 1984 - 1989 to 36 per thousand in 1999, and in the urban areas even to 18.3. Similarly, under-5 mortality rate was 69 per thousand; it came down to 49 per thousand in 1999. Maternal mortality rate of obstetric complications over 10,000 alive new born children has been on a decreasing trend from 115 in 1990 to 100 in 1995 and to 95 in 2000. However this rate does not reach the national target of 70.

Since 1997, the rate of malnourished children under 5 has declined steadily in all forms, including weight/age, height/age and weight/height. This result can be attributed to the people's improved living standards and local authorities' awareness of child malnutrition and efforts to prevent it. The effectiveness in malnutrition prevention for under-five children varies depending on economic condition of the locality. According to health experts, the average height of children has increased 2.6 cm. However, Vietnamese children's physical strength may still be lower than that of other regional countries.

The program of protein-energy malnutrition prevention for children under 5 years old was launched in 1993 and has received the participation of all administrative levels, branches and organizations. The incidence of underweight children under 60 months old (weigh-for-age malnutrition) has considerably decreased over the years. The numbers in 1985, 1994, 1997 and 2000 were 51.5 %, 43.7 %, 36.7 % and 33.1 % respectively. Severe malnutrition rate was reduced from 9 % in 1994, to 5.8 % in 2000. Nationwide, however, the weigh-for-age malnutrition is still at a high rate and has not yet reached the national goal. In rural and remote areas, malnutrition is still too high. To solve this situation, the health sector should make more effort in the coming decade.

The program of antenatal care and family planning has inserted direct influence on the work of protection and care for mother and children. More than 80 % of the women received assistance from health staff at the time of delivery. In the 1990s, the family planning was given decent resources and attention and as a consequence, the birth rate was significantly reduced. The average number of children per woman decreased from 3.8 in 1989 to 3.1 in 1994 and to 2.2. In the urban areas, it had come down to 1.7. Particularly in the rural areas, the decline has been dramatic: from 4.4 in 1989 to 2.6 in 1999; in the rural areas of the Red River Delta, it had come down to 2.1 in 1999.

1.4. Implementing child rights in Vietnam

Vietnam was the second country in the world to have countersigned the Convention on the Right of the Child (CRC) in February 1990. The child rights in the Convention document were transformed to the national laws: from 1991 to 1999, there were 13 laws and 120 decrees related to child issues. After the time of convention was available, Vietnamese government established the Law on Child Protection, Care and Education (LCPCE). This law basically referred to most of the child rights mentioned in the CRC. And then, the Congress of Developing the National Program Action on Child from 1991 to the year 2000 was organized in December 1991 in the country as a whole. The main goal of this congress aims to integrate child issues into the National Socio-economic Development Strategy with four priorities: child health, primary education, mental care for all children and protecting children who have specially difficult situation. By the year 2002, all the provinces, 70 percent of districts and 40 percent of communes have contributed and developed the action programme for children.

From the education sector, the programme were carried out on making universal primary education and eradicating illiteracy in the country, giving education and development supports to difficult areas. The programmes included the care for orphans, street children and early working children, the prevention of violence against children, and the prevention of drug. The Youth Union, in co-ordination with the cultural sectors and sport sectors had some action programme, which were focused on how to develop the cultural, mental and leisure activities of children. The Pioneer Central Organization, which depends on Youth Union, has co-ordinated with Committee for Protection and Care for Children and UNICEF to contribute some models of Child Rights education in the provinces, like for instance the models of Child Rights Clubs and The Child Houses. These activities helped children to present their own opinions, but also raised the opportunities for them of learning, playing and entertaining with others.

During the process of implementing various other programmes children were directly getting the benefits. The incidence of illness, infirmity and mortality among children was reduced rapidly. Also the proportion of lowly educated children decreased. Socially, children who become step by step affirmative themselves as they are more and more respected by government laws, the families, schools and communities. On the other hand, children have a more clear perception of their own rights. They were also educated about responsibilities related to the family, community and society. As the general point on feels that children today are likely to be more intelligent than the previous generation, because they have better quality of life and better condition of information.

As one of positive solutions, the communication activities on child rights was paid much attention by government and thus an advantageous environment was created for changing the general knowledge on Child rights at the community level. Mass Media are positively taking part in generalizing the CRC and the LCPCE from the national level down to the commune level. The Convention on the Right of the Child was translated to the minority ethnic languages such as: Thai, H' Mong, Ede and Bana. Approximately 150.000 documents of CRC

introduction and Child Right implementation guides were printed and distributed by Committee for the Protection and Care for Children. More than 6 million children have participated in an examination how to understand the CRC and the LCPCE that were organized by the Committee for Protection and Care for Children in co-ordination with Ministry of Education, Ministry of Justice, The Central Organization for Children, The National Television Office and The National Broadcasting Office.

Every year, many action days towards children were mobilized in the country as a whole. For example, we have the Day of Immunization for Children, the Day of Nutritious Quality and Care for Children, the Children International Day (1/6). Specifically, we use one month for action aims to children (from 30/5 until 30/6) with many specific activities in all provinces and country as a whole. In the cities, which expands and building some more public parks, flower gardens, Zoos, play grounds such as Water Parks, Thu Le Zoo in Ha Noi or the Central Zoo, Damsen Park in Ho Chi Minh city.

The international cooperation as an important factor has positively pushed up the surveillance and implementation works on CRC, National laws and other action programme objectives. For instance, the program in cooperation between Vietnam and UNICEF was one of ten biggest programme of UNICEF in the world. International NGOs such as Plan International and Radda Barnen also backed up many organizations inside the country with both material support and knowledge support.

However, the efforts of Vietnamese government and people mentioned above and of the other organisations are only the first steps towards the improvement of material and mental life for children. The challenges and urgent needs still exist:

- Malnutrition rate among children is still high. For example, malnutrition rate among children under 5 years was 39 percent in 1998, and until 2002, the situation had not much improved.
- 1.2 millions of children, almost all of them living in remote, isolated and poor areas can not go to school.
- Full child rights have not been ensured yet in some areas.
- The problem of poor children, street working children, criminal children, and children in social evil such as drug injection, prostitution and HIV/AIDS infection have not been addressed adequately.
- Bad behaviour against children are increasing in some areas such as: the evil treatments of children, dignity offences, trafficking in children especially of girls, sexual abuse, using children as illegal labourers, etc.
- Socially, the shortcoming is knowledge of implementing child rights as contained in the CRC and the national laws. Government investment has been less than required. The system of laws is not consolidated and also the laws carried out are not always rigorously. Monitoring and surveillance relating to children activities also have limitations. The preventive works on violence against children in families, schools and the society have not been much paid attention to as yet.

Chapter 2. Socio-economic Conditions in Three Regions.

The three areas, which were chosen for the research (Ha Noi, Ha Nam and Thai Nguyen), are located in the northern part of the country. They have been selected because they represent three different environments, and may give a good indication of what could be expected in other parts of the countries. Conditions in the southern part of the country, however, may be different, but for logistic reasons, the research could not be extended to another district.

2.1. Phuc Xa ward, Ha Noi

HaNoi, the capital of Socialist Republic of Vietnam, has an area of close to 1,000 sq. kilometers with a population of 4 million people (in 2002). Ha Noi has seven inner precincts and five suburban districts. One of the inner-city districts is Ba Dinh. It has 12 wards, and locates most of Hanoi government offices such as the National Assembly Building, the Presidency Palace, and Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and various foreign embassies. This district has many historical places such as the Northern, Eastern and Southern Gates, One Pillar Pagoda and the Ho Chi Minh Mausoleum. However, Ba Dinh district has many poor wards as well. Phuc Xa, one such wards, is situated close to the Red River dyke (one of two greatest rivers in Vietnam). It is located to the West of Hoan Kiem District and to the West of Tay Ho district in the West.

Phuc Xa ward, according to the report ‘The situation of implementing the socio-economic target, national security in 2000 and oriental task in 2001’ prepared by People Committee in Phuc Xa town, Ba Dinh district, in late 1999 had 3382 families with the population of 16.180 people. The number of children from 0 to 16 year-old is 3564, which represents 22 % of the population; children from 5–16 year-old are 2.344 of which are 38 orphans and 14 are disabled.

The geographic location of Phuc Xa has greatly influenced people and children's living. Every year, during floods in the rainy season (from 1 to 2 months), Phuc Xa is one of the first places to be flooded. Many families in flooded areas had to evacuate uncomfortably. This caused serious effects to the local infrastructure such as: roads, houses and water supply systems.

Because of its geographic location as one of the Hanoi’s gateways to northern provinces of Vietnam, Phuc Xa is a ward in Hanoi with a lot of immigrants. ‘Ben Nua’ bus station, ‘Long Bien’ market, one of the largest markets in Hanoi to import foods, goods from all provinces and distribute to other different markets in the city are two places where have a great amount of daily migration (approximately 1000/per day).

This situation made a great amount of people, who are living in the bus stations, markets, to open down-market services for immigrants or casual visitors. Third-fourth of the population is manual laborer with low income. Most of the economic activities of people in this ward are retail trades, small services, hired labour with the income fluctuates from 10.000 dong to 25.000 dong per day (US \$ = 15.000 dong). Moreover, approximately 1500 people retired or retired because of poor health. Most of them are workers, poor officials and belong to the low-income group in the ward.

The annual flood is another important feature of Phuc Xa ward, where is not suitable to build office buildings, luxury hotels but cheap lodging-houses. This ward has 70 lodging-houses for provincial laborers or street children.⁵ Recent years, the temporary houses in this ward built by the immigrants are relatively popular. These cottage and metal roofing houses without any address number locates as hamlets. These hamlets are called 'risky hamlet' because the owners of the houses do not have registration for permanent residence as well as constructing permits. Four risky hamlets in Phuc Xa ward are as follows:

- Risky hamlet in group 8 has 36 families with 119 people.
- Risky hamlet on the dike edge of group 9 has 9 families with 105 people.
- Risky hamlet in ditch side of group 2 has 17 families with 84 people.
- Risky hamlet at riverside has about 30 boats of illegal anchorage.

Recently, there is an appearance of several tents on the Red River bank. During the dry season, the number of wanderers resides in this area increases with about a hundred until they find lodging space elsewhere.

In the risky hamlets, underneath of Long Bien bridge, two Red River sandbanks are places of social evils. One of these evils is drug smuggling and consumption. This causes the increase of number of drug addicts. Presently, there are about one hundred drug addicts; 6 of them are female and 11 are under-age of which 1 is female. In one specific block, consisting of 40 families, 30 families have drug addicts or prisoners. Some were sent to the Center of Drug Prevention. Street children are also commonly found among the new immigrants. This group of children is at high risk of drug smuggling and utilizing. Sometimes, over 1000 children come and sell newspapers, polish shoes, and pick waste in this area.

Due to the geographic location and social economic situation, Phuc Xa is considered the poorest and the most complicated ward in Ba Dinh district as well as in the city. It has its own particular difficulties. According to the classification provided by the local People Committee, this ward has 109 poor families. Lacking of accommodation is also a serious matter of Phuc Xa ward. The houses are

⁵ This type of house is call 'sedge mat' lodging-house. Each individual has only one place for one sedge mat spread out on the floor and has to pay 1000 dong to 2000 dong per night. All most of the rooms in the lodging-houses locate in the host's houses. They are all small in size, lack of light and have no furniture. Each room can host 5-20 people/ per night depend on its size.

makeshift and cramped and lack of furniture. They locate side by side in the narrow and dirty streets which are sultry and stuffy. Children do not have any playground. They gather together in the narrow and crowded streets full of bicycles and motorbikes.

The ward's medical and educational activities belong directly to the general system of the whole city. This ward has 1 primary school with 23 classrooms and 728 pupils, 1 secondary school with 9 classrooms and 687 pupils. Besides, due to the particular situation, some schools, classrooms have been built for orphans, poor children, street children and young working children, for whom it is impossible to access the normal education. For instance, there is the '19-5 warm house' where Ba Dinh Committee for Protecting and Care for children is feeding and teaching 30-40 children. From 1997 to 2001, the ward has received about 300-400 million dong from Plan International Organization to sponsor 219 children. This sum of money is used to provide children equipment to study or to buy materials for vocational training. This organization has also supported the poor families to rebuild their own houses ⁶. However, the entire ward and international organization's efforts have not met the real requirements.

2.1. La Son commune, Ha Nam Province

Ha Nam is one of the poorest provinces in Red River delta. This province's income is basically from agricultural production limited cultivated land. Infertile soil, flooded rice fields, year-round inundation are particular features that make disadvantageous for cultivation. In the period of market economy, This province has achieved some progresses in comparison with the previous periods of renovation. Generally, Ha Nam is still suffering from the weak economic and technological infrastructure and lacking of foreign investment. Presently, the total year-round cultivated area is 98497 hectare, of which 74.332 hectare is rice fields. The productivity of the two rice harvests of the year achieves 97.84 quintal/hectare. The total productivity of the whole year is 399743 tons. The industrial and small-scale industrial productions develop slowly due to backward industrial equipment and incompetent cadres. It results in product's quality and is impossible to control the market. The whole province has 12/14 industries, which have higher growth than previous years had such as: water supply and exploitation (79%), sewing (47%), stone exploitation (17,4%), beverage (10%). Some local enterprises are step by step adapting themselves into the market, exploiting local potential, providing work as well as increasing the income.⁷ The difficult social-economic situation in Ha Nam province has resulted in high migrant to the Southern provinces and cities.

⁶ According to the Report of "The situation of children's protection and care first 6 month in 2001" prepared by Committee for Protection, Care and Education of Phuc Xa town, Ha Noi.

⁷ According to the report of 'The situation of implementing social-economic task in 2000' prepared by People Committee in Ha Nam province.

Binh Luc, a district in the Southeast of Ha Nam province in Red River delta, closes to Duy Tien and Ly Nhan districts in the North; Nam Dinh in the South and East; Thanh Liem in the West. This district has 20 villages and 1 town. Natural territory is 153,97 sq. kilometres; 10.092 hectare cultivated land. Up to these days, the district has 39.105 families with population of 154.251, in which 76.445 are male, 77.806 are female. Children under 16 year-old are 52.472 and make up 34%.⁸

The district has the highway 21A passes by and the local transport systems have been upgraded with asphalt to every village as well as cement to every hamlet. This makes it easily to exchange relations among the villages, towns in the district. The whole district has 50 schools of which are 20 primary schools, 22 junior secondary schools, 4 senior secondary schools and pre-schools open in every hamlet. Like other regions, the district has one hospital in the center and each town and village has its own medical and radio station. The average income per capita is 124.000 VND/per month. The number of poor families (according to the new estimated standard in the period of 2001-2005) is 5.056 make up 12,93%. The district, according to the documents published by the People's Committee of Binh Luc, has 1.840 teachers and 28 doctors of which 23 doctors are working in the district center and 5 others are working in different village's medical stations.

The distance from La Son to Binh Luc district is 4 kilometres. The commune locates in high level land in Binh Luc district, Ha Nam province. Its natural territory is 774 hectare; cultivated land is 603,8 hectare. Because of 1 meter of location lower than the sea level, floods happen every year. La Son commune has 13 hamlets. The distance from the farthest village to the centre is 5 kilometres.

The mode of production mainly used here is agriculture. In 1996-2000, agricultural productivity achieved 5.536-ton increase 32,6% in comparison with productivity in 1995. In 1999, rice capacity is 105 kg/hectare; food capacity is 5.708-ton.⁹ However, due to the rapid increase of population, the rice production is only enough to satisfy its own demand. The average per capita is 800 kg to 850-kg rice/ per year. The basic difficulties of La Son are rice monoculture, slow transfer of agricultural economic mechanism, limited applies of progressive technologies into produce. This village still has not provided works for the people during the rest time of the harvest efficiently.

In 1999, breeding has increased 50% in comparison with its in 1995. In 2000, La Son has 559 buffaloes and cows, 2.900 pigs and 30.500 different cattle, yearly meat productivity achieves 165 –171 ton, and average is 25-kg meat/person/per year.

Small-scale industries develop slowly, embroider is a main traditional career but only 200 families still remain this career (12,4%). 45 families make conical hats,

⁸ Report of The situation of the social economic development in Binh Luc town, Ha Nam province, 2001' by People Committee of Binh Luc province

⁹ See the report of 'The situation of geography, economy, culture and society in La Son town, Binh Luc district, Ha Nam province, 2001' prepared by La Son People Committee.

60 families work as carpenters and bricklayers, 50 families open their small businesses, and 20 families work as millers.

About 10% of the total number of the families has sub-careers. Besides, some others families are doing their own business and many families have people gone to work in Hanoi, Nam Dinh and Phu Ly. They joint in the labor force in the cities during the rest time of the rice harvest. The most difficulty prevents sub-career in La Son from developing is the consume market. In 1999-2000, the district has tried to bring about handicraft industries to change product mechanism to increase the income of the laborers. But it was failed because of the limited consume. These handicraft are artificial eyelashes, sewing, sawing and horn handicraft. 90% peasants living in this district are unemployed because people have much free time (about seven months to one year). Presently, in La Son, 79 families are lacking of food (living in poverty), 80 families are lacking money for medical care, and 233 poor families make up 14,5 % with 834 inhabitants make up 12,4%. The average income per capita is 1,3 million VND per year.

According to the local government, poverty happening in La Son is classified as follows: 164 families are lacking of capital (70,38%), 79 families have ill and disable people (33,9%), 49 families are lacking of experiences in producing and doing business (21,03%), 26 families have over birth rate given (11,1 %).

Recent years, poverty-alleviation movement in La Son has obtained its first results: 20% starveling-poverty families in 1995. In 2001, starveling families reduced in zero and poverty families decreased to 7%. La Son have received many loans from poverty-alleviation fund and initially used this capital in developing production and business. Up to now, La Son basically erased cottage houses, one-third of the families in the village has built flat roof houses. Water supply system, bath room, rest room have better been improved. People in the village have contributed to make a concrete transportation network among the hamlets in the village. The second school has been built. Kindergarten, nursery school, and medical centers have been upgraded. Although, it is still a poor village with 145 cottage houses but electricity has been taken to every house. Prostitution and drug usage are almost finished. Gambling, drunk sometimes happened in the festival or during Tet holidays but were stopped timely by village authorities and youth union.

2.3. Quang Son commune, Thai Nguyen

Quang son, a midland and mountainous commune, has three main economic areas: rice field, tea planting and forestry. The commune's territory is 1600 hectare of which 323,6 hectare of agricultural land, 723,6 hectare of forestry, and 17,3 hectare of inhabitant land. This village has 15 hamlets, 529 families with 2337 people of 9 ethnic groups in which 40% is King people, 38% is Nung, San Diu, Hmong, Muong, Thai, Tay, Cao Lan, Chinese people. The number of children aged from 15 and up is 1566. There are 771 children under 15 year-old.

Presently, 88% of population in Quang Son works in agriculture, 15% of population plants industrial trees, 2-5% exploits stone, and some families do their own businesses.¹⁰

During the last 5 years, the economy has achieved a stable development in comparison with last years. In 1996, the average rice capacity reached 28 kg /per hectare, in 1999 was 35-kg/ hectare. The worth of 1 cultivated hectare reached 11-12 million dong.

Tea planting has brought great income and been considered a main income of the commune. Before 1996, the total tea planting area was 50 hectare and this amount increased to 125 hectare in 1999. A 1-kg fresh tender tealeaf is worth equal or more than 1kg of rice. Another main income of the people in this area is wood exploitation and afforests. Since 1980, the village has no primeval forest. After the year 1990s, 350 hectare of land and forest were distributed into 300 families. In 1991- 1994, 150 hectare of forest has been grown with the support from Pam program. In 2000, the village implemented program No 661 in group 3 to grown 16 hectare of forest.

During last five years, the poor families have received a total loan of 500 million dong to develop production. This appears to have helped. The proportion of poverty-stricken in 1998 was 26%. In 2000, this reduced to 12%. All hamlets, except for one, have electricity, and 50% of the families has a TV. Among ethnic minority groups in Quang Son, only Hmong people still remains shifting cultivation of wandering hill tribes. Now, the commune authorities have encouraged 32 families with 202 inhabitants to settle agriculture and build permanent houses. They support peasants to rebuild houses, pigsty and build fresh and pure water supply, and classrooms inside the village, build new road, help with capital, material and fertilizer etc.

Education is one of the most important strategies of the village. Materials and school's equipment have been provided in order to stop studying in the night shift. Strengthening teacher's quality (16) was an important matter. In 1997, there were no excellent teachers but in 2000, there were 6 excellent teachers. Primary and Junior Secondary Schools in the town have received young teachers trained at regular training course from Thai Nguyen city to replace the old teachers. Partially because of this influx, the level of education went up. In 1997, there were no district excellent pupils. In 2000, there were 12 excellent pupils.

However, according to the estimation of the commune's authorities, teaching and studying quality are not satisfying. A number of pupils giving up study is still occurring. There are only 15 people who have finished senior secondary school. The Hmong people are almost illiteracy. It is very difficult for the people to access school because of 15-20 kilometres far away from the village.

¹⁰ The report of 'The situation of social-economic development in Quang Son town, Dong Hy district, Thai Nguyen province, 2001' prepared by Quang Son People Committee.

The commune also encourages people to join in the preventive medical programs, provides more equipment and develops treatment quality at every medical station. Presently, the proportion of malnourished children is 41%; the development of population is 1,8%. During last five years, there was not any epidemic disease in the area. Now, each medical station has 2 doctors and 2 nurses, 4 sickrooms with 8 sick beds. The collaborators and 14 trained medical cadres are working. The commune has only one private pharmacy. 98% of women have gynaecology examined; most of the families have their own pure wells instead of using water from rivers or streams. The commune post office and cultural club were built in one building and the commune has one system of megaphone radio.

Social evils such as drug addict, gambling are still complicated matters (the village has 7 drug addicts). Public and private property theft do occur. In general, according to the Quang Son's authorities, the commune's economy is slowly developed and has a weak infrastructure, with an incompetent cadre, and government policies and laws are not always carefully implemented.

Chapter 3. Needy Children, an Outline

A sociological survey was conducted among 154 households, of which 50 in Ha Noi, 50 in Ha Nam and 54 in Thai Nguyen. The majority of the households were the poor (55.2 %) and were in the middle income (33.7 %) category; 1.3 % were destitute families, and 3.9 % and 0.6 % belonged to the well-to-do and rich families respectively. In terms of education, 18.8 % of the parents interviewed had finished primary school, 52,6 % had finished the secondary school, 13.6 % had finished the high school and 1.3 % were college or university graduates.

Within these households, altogether 318 children were interviewed, of which 159 were girls and 156 were boys (with 3 missing cases); 37.7 % of them were between 9 and 12, and 63.3 % were between 13 and 16 years. Only 14.2 % of the children were not member of an organisation: 74.8 % was a member of the Pioneer organisations, and 11 % was with the Youth Federation.

Most of the parents (85.5 %) were living together; in 6.6 % of the cases the father or the mother had died and in respectively 1.3 % and 2.8 % of the households, the parents were living separate or were divorced. Nuclear household accounted for 76,6 % and multi-generation households for 18,2 %.

Table 3.1. Family Profession of the Parents

	Father	Mother
Farmer	184 (57,9 %)	200 (62,9 %)
Worker	35 (11,0 %)	22 (6,9 %)
Staff in the government sector	15 (4,7 %)	6 (1,9 %)
Trade	6 (1,9 %)	26 (8,2 %)
Soldier	6 (1,9 %)	
Wood worker	2 (0,6 %)	
Others	36 (11,3 %)	39 (12,3 %)
Missing	34 (10,7 %)	23 (7,2 %)

3.1. Child Participation in Labor

Currently in Vietnam, child labor has aroused a lot of controversy, not only among researchers and social activists, but also among parents and the children themselves.

It is a growing phenomenon in all continents that children have to work, and are even heavily exploited. It is indeed a tragedy threatening humankind. In the face of this situation, many people have demanded a total elimination of child labor and return the working children to school. However, this viewpoint has confronted with obstacles from people of different strata. They are concerned

with, first of all, education fees. It is not simple for both the state and families, particularly low income earners, to afford the increasing expenses associated with education.

Family financial situation is also a pressure. Although Vietnam has provided free education for primary school children, financial constraints are still facing many households, particularly rural households. Children of rich or economically stable households have more time to learn and play. Meanwhile children of needy households or rural households whose financial situation is poorer than urban ones, have to work to increase their family's income. Children from these households not only have to do housework, but also work to earn a living and to improve their family income.

We should differentiate child labor and children doing the work suited to their health to help their families, to learn the working skills and to respect labor. In the second case, work is a healthy educational practice to urge children to do the work suited to their age and health. The work that children often do such as looking after their younger brothers and sisters, housework, assisting their parents in the field, tending buffaloes, cutting the grass and others, have been considered a good and popular educational method in Vietnam.

However, the question is the level of child labor. How to combine child labor and childcare and education? How to make child labor meet the rights and interest of the children themselves? How to prevent the individuals, households and community from abusing child labor, and affecting the comprehensive development of their personality? All these issues require us to have full, precise and objective understanding of labor characters, types, causes, effects and extent.

'Child labor' as a concept refers to the case of children who have to make a living as an adult. In many cases, the children have to do heavy and hazardous work, detrimental to their health. Some studies have been conducted in Vietnam.

A study on working children in rural areas of Vietnam (in Thanh Hoa, HaTinh, Bac Kan and Dac Lac provinces) conducted by a team co-ordinated by Joachim Theis and Hoang Thi Huyen (Save the Children 1997)¹¹ produced interesting findings which can serve as a background to this study.

Ages and Gender. The research found that children in rural parts of Vietnam generally begin working at the age of six, or even earlier. First activities include sweeping the house and the yard, guarding the house, taking care of younger siblings and feeding chickens. As children grow older they are given increasingly responsible jobs that take them further away from home. By the time children reach the age of 15 they are expected to work like adults. Work of very young children is not yet differentiated according to sex, and boys and girls do the same activities. With growing age the gendered division of labour becomes more pronounced and is fully developed by the time children enter their late teens. Typical work of women and girls include cooking, taking care of small children,

¹¹ The research team consisted of SCF/ UK staff, researchers from the Youth Research Institute and members of the Women's Union and the CPCC.

transplanting and harvesting rice. Ploughing the fields, driving an ox cart or transporting the rice harvest are considered 'men's' jobs. Most kinds of work are categorised as either 'women's' or 'men's' work, but in practice gender divisions are not as rigid as in many other societies. Work within the family is divided rather pragmatically and is done by whoever is available. Men can be seen doing 'women's' tasks and vice versa, but more often boys will substitute for their father and girls for their mother if the parents are absent.

Likes and Dislikes. Although children cannot normally choose the work they have to do, they have clear preferences for certain jobs. Children's dislikes for certain types of work provide an insight into their own criteria for categorising work. Children like to help and please their parents, to contribute to the family's income and well – being, and to earn money for their own education. They also like to do activities that are suited to their physical abilities and work deemed suitable to their sex. Children prefer to do work that allows them to have some fun or to pursue their personal interests at the same time. Tending buffalos is one such activity where groups of boys and girls go out together with their families. Boys tend to prefer social activities that allow them to be outside with their friends, while some girls show a preference for the quiet of their home where they can do their chores while pursuing their studies or play with their younger siblings. Only girls showed a concern for low returns for their labour and for wasting time. They appeared to be more socially and economically conscious than boys and to care more about others. Boys seemed to care mainly about themselves. Activities which children dislike are those which are hard and heavy, expose them to excessive heat or cold, are embarrassing or shameful, make them vulnerable to being scolded or physically punished, are dirty, uncomfortable, and pose risks of physical discomfort and injury. Some girls and boys also expressed an aversion for activities of the opposite sex. Two of the least popular activities were begging and salt making.

Work time and education. Children's daily work hours increase as they get older and children work an average of six hours each day aside from going to school. Those who do not attend school work eight or more hours. As everywhere in the world, girls and women generally work longer hours than boys and men. Girls work an average of one hour per day longer than boys. Primary schools run two four – hour shifts every day which allows children to combine education and work obligations. This has contributed to the relatively high rate of school attendance and literacy among Vietnam's population. School attendance rates in rural lowland areas were reported to be around 90 per cent for children between six and ten. This rate, however, drops sharply over the following years and very few children remain in school after turning 16. School attendance rates for young boys and girls were roughly equal.

Children's contribution to the household economy. Children's contributions to the household labour output and to the family economy are critical for rural families. Based on the research data, it is estimated that in family of two adults and three teenage children, 30 to 40 per cent of all household labour is done by the children. Children under 15 are involved in a diverse range of activities to

help their families. In general their work contributions are just considered as supporting work rather than as money earning work. This applies particularly to girls (and women) whose contributions to housework and farming tend to be undervalued even though they may work harder and longer hours than their male cohorts. Children fulfil a critical role in relieving adults from much of the low – value and low – return, but time consuming work, such as housework, child minding or taking care of the buffalo. This frees adults to concentrate their efforts on higher value income – earning work.

Wage labour. Wage labour is becoming increasingly widespread in rural Vietnam, not only among adults, but also among children (aged ten and older). The economic transition from a cooperative – based to a household – based form of production has had a significant impact on the use and management of labour resources. Different kinds of labour arrangements are practised, including seasonal day labouring, labour exchange between households, long – term wage labour in small enterprises, the ‘renting out’ of children, and ‘selling’ or giving away of children. The category of ‘wage labour’ children are involved in depends largely on the bargaining power of their parents. The more desperate a family, the lower the return they receive for sending their children away to work for someone else. Children of the poorest families receive little more than food for working for another family.

The Report *From Housework to Gold Mining* has also made significant observations on the effects of the new economic policy on the position of children. It states that with the re – emergence of the market economy, the demand for income and for labour has increased dramatically. Children in rural areas of Vietnam have always worked. The economic reform process has not led to a fundamental change in this regard, but with the shift from a planned to a market economy and with the privatisation of most agricultural work, households have been turned again into micro – enterprises. Families now have to obtain and manage their own means of production and have to supply their own labour resources. Overall the work load has increased, also of children, but since on the other hand, living conditions have also improved and people see a direct link between their work and their rewards.

One of the groups that has not been able to take advantage of the new opportunities created by the economic liberalisation are the absolute poorest. They suffer not only from a lack of material resources but also from illnesses, disabilities and social stigma. The children of these marginalised and disenfranchised groups in the community are often exposed to gross violations of their rights, more so than children from less poor families. At home, children face risks, such as rape or physical abuse, and in the workplace they are subjected to exploitation. Serious forms of abuse and exploitation of child labourers are relatively rare in rural areas, but, instances have been documented of children who were beaten for being negligent in tending animals, who were raped by their employers or were sold by their parents. Children are working for example in gold mining in the mountainous Bac Kan province (where corporal punishment is not rare), and in coffee production in Dac Lac province. Children who go to Dac Lac

for the harvest usually go in groups of friends, neighbours or relatives and either work in the coffee fields, or do domestic chores for residents or for other migrants.

The study (Save the Children 1997: VII-VIII) commented on the wide diversity of work done by children, and the important role children's work for household production as follows:

Children's work is an essential resource in the livelihood strategies of poor rural household who often would not be able to make ends meet without children's help. Children's work reproduces rural society with its divisions of labour and allocation of responsibilities. It partially develops children's personalities and defines their roles in society. Through working children acquire the skills and knowledge they will need as adults. It is also a way for them to enter the gendered division of labour, and inculcates them with an understanding of their own roles and responsibilities in society.

More research is necessary to obtain a deeper and more comprehensive picture of the situation of child workers and child migrants. There are number of additional topics that should be pursued, including children survival strategies and coping mechanisms and children information networks.

The present survey provides some indication on the prevalence of child labour. We conducted personal interviews with the children themselves. The underlying idea was that as far as possible, working children should be allowed to express their own ideas. They should be stimulated to develop their ideas further. This will ensure that any interventions are truly based on the interests, needs and capacities of children who work.

We first look at the correlation between age and types of work involving children. Table 3.2 shows the percentage of children participating in different types of work is different by age. Older children are always more involved in all types of work. In work that is considered light, such as baby care, the percentages of both age groups are rather similar: around 12 % in both age categories. On the other hand, there is a big difference in the percentages of children involving in heavier work such as working in the rice field. The findings show that 30 % of children aged between 13-16 say they work in the rice field, while only 10 % of children aged between 9-12 do so. It is easy to understand because bigger children will have sufficient physical strength and skills to do the job. However, we also see not a small proportion of children aged between 9- 12 participating in this work. In this case, the work may be beyond their physical strength and the parents may get the smaller children involved in order to reach their economic target, while neglecting education and health protection for their children.

Table 3.2. Child Work by Age (% of the Total Number of Children)

Type of work	9-12	13-16
Cooking, washing dishes, sweeping house	33.3	56.6

Harvesting crops	12.9	29.6
Working in rice fields	10.4	30.8
Tending buffalos, cows	14.2	23.6
Breeding pigs, poultry	8.2	27.0
Gathering firewood	11	18.2
Baby care	11.6	12.6
Fetching water	2.8	11.9
Husking, pounding rice	1.9	5.7
Involving in trade activities	2.5	9.1
Assisting parents in trade activities	5.7	12.9
Making money by their own (shoe shining, inflating bicycle tyres)	1.9	8.5
Other work	6.9	6.6

Speaking about the economic purpose of child labor, let's take a look at jobs that children do only to make money such as shining shoes, inflating bicycle tyres etc. These jobs are often done by older children. Table 3.2 also shows that these activities involved 8.5 % of children aged between 13 - 16, and only 1.9 % of children aged between 9 - 12. So we can say that the older the children are, the more they are involved in economic activities and their participation differs in different jobs.

3.1.1. Contribution

The findings from the survey in Ha Noi, Thai Nguyen and Ha Nam show that as many as 52.2 % of the children interviewed said they contributed between 10 – 20 % of the total income of their households; 7.9 % said they contributed between 30 – 40 %. In some households, the children maintained they contributed even a larger part to their family income. Some (1.9 %) even said they contributed 50 % or higher. So, in their opinion, on an average they contribute between 10 – 40 % to their family budget.

Most of the cases kept in our diaries and interviews with children in the 3 sites acknowledge that the children have to help their families in economic activities to make a living. A 13-year-old school boy from Quang Son commune told us:

My job is to cook, wash dishes, sweep the house, fetch water, cook food for and feed the pigs. I have to weed 3 'Sao' of tea (19) and assist my mother in the quarry. I take the rocks to her so that she will only smash them to pieces. With my help, she can save much time and smash more rocks to earn more money.

Nguyen Thu Th. is a 15-year-old girl in Phuc Xa ward with a leg disability and who has dropped out of school. Her parents are involved in different jobs such as tailoring, repairing water pipes, selling meat paste and grilled meat, and making envelopes. She has been involved in such productive work:

Everyday I go to the workshop to take the meat paste for my mother to sell by retail. I also join her in selling then go back home to make envelopes. Everyday I can earn 7,000 dong from selling meat paste and 5,000 dong from making envelopes. After that I have to wash clothes for all family members, wash dishes and assist my mother in making garments.

Even sick children have to work for money as their family is too poor, such as the case of Tran Van T., 16, from La Son commune. T suffers from kidney gravel. T said:

My father died of kidney gravel some years ago. My mother has suffered from a tumor in her belly for 10 years but we cannot afford her treatment. My 6-year-old younger brother suffers from rheumatism and me, from kidney gravel. I have to leave school to help my mother working in the field and selling bread. I only wish to be healthy enough to go to Hanoi to earn a living and to help my mother.

Even if children go to school, they may spend quite a lot of time working after they return from school. Mr Vu Dinh C, the Principle of La Son lower secondary school commented: 'Many of my students go to school in the morning, and in the afternoon they have to catch crabs and shellfish from the field for sale. As a result, they have very little time to learn and doing home exercises.'

Around one third of the children interviewed maintain that they don't generate any income for their families. This does not necessarily mean that the children do not do any type of work. It might be that these children only do housework, or they are also involved in productive labor but that they could not estimate their contribution to their families' income.

It appears that boys and girls take equal shares in the work.

Looking at site of residence, we found that the number of children involving in income-generation activities is highest in Thai Nguyen, which is followed by Ha Noi and Ha Nam.

In addition to farm work, children in Thai Nguyen also undertake other jobs, such as collecting forest products, growing tea and working at the quarry. Many children sell forest products or work at the quarry to receive daily payment. Those who are working at the quarry usually have little land or no land at all (including those who migrated from other areas or get married here). Most of children of these families are adolescents and young adults including school pupils and dropouts. Hoang Van V., a 16 years old 8th grader, and his two elder brothers, Hoang Van T. 18, and Hoang Van D. 20 (who are school dropouts), work at the quarry with their parents. V. earns 10,000 dong a day. His parents and brothers earn 15,000 to 25,000 dong a day. V. is still a child but he is certainly not the youngest child to work in the quarry:

Bui Gia D., a 13 years old 8th grader of Quang Son School, is the son of Mr. T and Mrs. H. His family has only 3 Sao of hilly land planting tea, and so they have to work at the quarry for 8 hours a day, and each person earns 20,000 – 25,000 dong a day. After school time, D and his older brother (16

years old) assist their parents in quarrying and loading stones onto a truck. It is a hard work to their age but they have to do because it is the main job of their family. D goes to school on half of the day and works at the quarry on the remainder, so he earns half of what the parents earn. When there is no work at the quarry, D again works for hire picking tea leaves and earns VND 10,000 a day. Besides, D has to weed, and plant tea in his family garden, prepare the meals, sweep the house, wash dishes, fetch water, and feed 2 - 3 pigs and 20 chicken. As D is very busy working to earn a living, his school performance is only average.

Even younger than D. is Ly Van H., an 11 years old lad from the H'Mong ethnic minority group. He is a 6th grader in the lower secondary school and helps his parents to the extra income. The family is very poor and the maize field can feed them for only 6 months. They are engaged for picking tea leaves during 4 months of the year and earn 120,000 dong per month. H. earns 5,000 – 6,000 dong per day from the quarry.

Households in Ha Nam province are involved in handicrafts such as embroidery, and making conical hats. Children help parents with these activities. In comparison with quarrying, this work is lighter but requires the handicraft people to be careful and patient. These jobs attract most of the girls and some boys too. Dinh Van T., 14 years old, 7th grader of La Son lower secondary school is a dexterous boy. Besides farm work, his family makes conical hats for sale. He is the main hat maker in the family. His mother and his 12-year-old younger sister assist him in the productive work. After school time, he can make 2 hats and earns 5,000 dong a day. Similarly dexterous is the girl presented in the following case.

Pham Thi N., 14 years old, 9th grader, living in Dong Van village, La Son commune, is the second of the six children in the family. The main source of her family's income is from agricultural production. Her family cultivates 15 Sao of paddy field, and obtains an average yield of 180 kg per Sao. So they don't have enough food. In the slack season, her father works for hire as a builder. Her mother, her 12 year-old younger sister and she herself make conical hats. N. earns 1,000 dong a day from making conical hats. She said the work is not hard but boring. Besides, she has to wash clothes, and cook for the whole family. Sometimes she goes to the field to catch crabs for food or for sale. She likes to catch crabs as she will have a chance to go out to the fields and chat with her friends. They can play games for a while before coming back home.

Comparing with Ha Nam, types of labor in Thai Nguyen are more diverse and when the children receive direct payment from owners, they are more aware that they generate income for their families. Children in Hanoi are involved in household occupations such as making hats, embroidery, lace work with a very low pay, and like those who join their parents in farm work don't see that they also make money. There are not many children in Hanoi who work to earn a living by themselves. Meanwhile those who assist their parents in small trade (looking after the shop, selling goods), or working for hire (fetching water, working as porter) don't think that they are involved in productive labor, and

don't know how much they earn because their parents keep all the money. Findings show that among children said by parents to be involved in income-generation activities, only 4.5 % are from Ha Noi, 29.5 % are from Ha Nam, and 65.9 % from Thai Nguyen. This result can be explained by their parents' understanding about income-generation activities as the children receiving money directly from owners or from customers (selling forest products, shoe shining, inflating bicycle tyres, etc.) and if the children only 'assist', then it is difficult to count how much money they earn.

3.1.2. Differences Across Households

We tried to find out any impact of the household's economic condition on child labor, and were very surprised to see that none of the destitute households said their children contributed significantly to their income. Only 29.5 % of the poor households have children contributing to the income, while 33.3 % of the medium households have, and 33.3 % of the well-off households have.

The findings show that although some parents are low-educated, they don't force their children to work hard. They understand the disadvantages of poor education in their life and work. Now they want their children to be highly educated so they can change their life in the future, so they make sacrifices for the children by doing all work and let them study. They hope their children will have good job with higher income and can support them in their old age. In Vietnam, there are many parents with low education or even illiteracy, who have children holding university or PhD. degree.

In all the 3 research areas, children from well-off households make more contributions to household income than those from poor households, and children in a nuclear household contribute more than those in an extended household. On the other hand, in households with highly-educated parents, children contribution to household income is small.

Obviously, not only financial difficulties compel households to involve their children in income-generation activities. The more well-off the households are, the more they need to involve their children in income-generation activities. So, we are required to reconsider our previous statement that the household's financially difficult conditions forced children to work to generate income. Child labor is not simply the result of poverty, but also relates to the concept and viewpoint of each particular household.

Table 3.3. Proportion of income-generation work involving children (parents' perception)

Type of work	Boys (%)		Girls (%)	
	< 13	≥ 13	<13	≥ 13
Breeding cattle, pig, poultry	7.6	15.3	7.6	11.8
Working in the rice field	2.8	12.5	4.2	7.6
Assisting parents in small trade activities	0.7	3.5	0	4.9
Independent trade and services	0	1.4	0	1.4

We have interviewed the parents about their children's contributions to household income. Findings show that as many as 30.3 % of the interviewed parents recognised the role. Most of them say that their children contribute between 10 – 20 % to household income; 4.4 % think it is at least half. The parents in the three regions all acknowledged that children have to work to increase their household income, but they, however, also say that they are only involved in jobs suitable to their health, and parents spend time for them to help them in their studies. In their estimates, the contributions of boys and girls to household income are rather similar.

The data are different from the self-perception that children have. As we have seen earlier, children consider for example that 24.2 % is looking after the babies, and almost 90 % claims that they contribute to cooking and cleaning the house. The parents' estimates are much lower. Either the children are overstating their claim, or the parents are not really recognizing the many (small) contributions, which children at various moments make to the running of the households. If both misrepresentations are true, then we may conclude nevertheless that children play a substantial role.

Table 3.4. Child labor in non income-generation activities (%)

Type of work	Boys		Girls	
	< 13	≥ 13	< 13	≥ 13
Baby care, cooking, sweeping house	28.7	29.9	30.3	40.8
Husking, pounding rice, fetching water	0.7	5.6	0.7	5.8

According to the parents, there is a rather large percentage of children, both boys and girls, and both under and over 13 participating in light housework such as taking care of younger brothers and sisters, cooking and sweeping house. Meanwhile, a small proportion of children over 13, and very small proportion of children under 13 are involved in rather heavy work such as husking, pounding rice and fetching water.

Most of the parents who were interviewed said they only assign their children with work that suit their health and time, as the school curricula is very heavy now. For school children, the parents try to arrange time for them to study. One example illustrates a general practice:

Mrs. Au Thi T. is a 44-year-old farmer of Nung ethnic minority group in Quang Son commune. She is a widow with 5 children; one daughter already got married, and two others have dropped school and are now working on the farm and at the quarry. T. is now bringing up the two younger daughters. Both of them perform well at school; one is an 11th grader, and receives scholarship from Thai Nguyen City, the other is a 9th grader and has been a

front-rank pupil for 8 years. The family grows tea on 2 Sao, and rice and maize on 1.5 Mau. Her two elder daughters earn 40,000 dong a day. She rates her family as average, which means that they have enough food. She had done well at school but had to drop out because her family was so poor and could not afford her schooling. Now, she wishes that her youngest daughters can continue studying to compensate for the deprivation of their mother and elder sisters and can change their lives in the future. So after school, the younger children only do light housework such as preparing the meals, washing dishes, sweeping the house, and feeding the pigs and buffalos. They take the textbooks with them to learn while tending the buffalos (from 14 – 17hrs). At home they study from 19 – 21hrs, and then go to bed. T. maintained that such time for study is enough, and she will give them more time when they enter higher classes. Besides studying and working, her daughters also learn music, badminton, and mini-football. She stimulates her children to play games as she thinks it will be good for their health and learning ability.

Asked about this issue the group of parents in Lane 71, Tan Ap Street, Phuc Xa commune said: ‘At this age, their main task is learning. Learning takes all their time. They are small, and at school age, they must go to school’. They knew of some children who are sent out to work, but they generally disapproved of it:

Although we are poor we still manage to bring them up. They are going to school, so we have to take care of their needs to let them be equal to their class mates. But they just do some light work. They are not very busy working. If there are lots of thing to do, we, parents have to do ourselves. In general children help parents do housework such as sweeping the house, washing dishes, and preparing the meals. The elder children cook the meals, the younger do other work.

Rural children, particularly farmers’ children, are more disadvantaged since there are is so much work on the farm that they have to do. A group of parents in Thuong Thu village, La Son commune, said:

After school they have to prepare the meal if their parents come home late. In the afternoon, they have to collect the drying rice paddy, feed pigs and chickens.

They study while tending buffalos or taking care of younger sisters or brothers. Main time for study is in the evening, after dinner.

But the same group of parents in this rural neighbourhood also insisted that the life of children should be made as comfortable as possible so that they are provided ‘with the best conditions to study, to make their life easier’ and so that they have enough time to play: ‘Sometimes, they go out to play until 9 or 10 p.m, and we have to call them back home. Most of the time they spend with their friends, chatting, singing, or playing games such as skipping. The boys play football and tug of war’.

Most of the parents whom we interviewed found it necessary to tutor their children at home. Parents in Vietnam indeed do seem to help their children quite a lot in their studies. A study by the Youth Research Institute (1997) among around 759 pupils found that only 5.3 % of the pupils were never helped by their parents and that 43 % were helped very regularly. The percentages were slightly different for the different social classes, but not significantly.

3.1.3. Gender balance in child labor in the household

The following Table 3.6 shows the gender balance in current child labor patterns. The table shows a rather equal percentage of boys and girls involved in different types of work. There is no big difference in boy and girl participating in work said to be ‘female oriented’ such as sweeping house, washing dishes and cooking. Findings show that 43.5 % of boys and 46.3 % of girls undertake these tasks, while 15.6 % of girls and 8.8 % of boys have to take care of their younger brothers or sisters. So we can say that parents apparently do not discriminate in selecting boys or girls to give the task. However, parents still trust girls in baby care because they are more careful and not so engrossed in playing as boys.

Table 3.5. Proportion of child labor patterns by gender (%)

Type of work	Boys	Girls	Not participating
Tending buffalos, cows	20.0	17.8	62.2
Breeding pigs, poultry	16.2	18.7	65.1
Baby care	8.9	15.6	75.6
Cooking, washing dishes, sweeping house	43.5	46.3	10.2
Gathering firewood	14.3	14.3	71.4
Fetching water	8.3	6.3	84.4
Working in rice fields	19.0	22.2	58.7
Husking, pounding rice	4.1	3.5	92.4
Involving in trade activities	5.1	6.7	88.3
Assisting parents in trade activities	7.9	10.8	81.3
Making money by their own (shoe shining, inflating bicycle tyres)	5.4	5.1	89.5
Harvesting crops	20	22.5	57.5
Other work	6.0	7.3	86.7

In impoverished households, more girls tend to drop out to earn a living than boys, such as the cases of Tran Thi Th., and Vi Thi Ng. from La Son; Ly Thi Th. from Quang Son, and Nguyen Thu Th. from Phuc Xa. The parents of Tran Thi Bich Th., 16, from La Son was very sad when talking about her daughter:

Th. finished grade 9. She is very good at learning and loves to learn very much. We are poor. We have 3 children; 2 of them have to work with parents everyday. Our 7-year-old youngest son has to watch the chicken, not to let them scratch rice paddies drying on the yard. Our second son goes to the field to catch crabs and shellfish for meal or for sale. He can sell them for some thousands of dong a day. Sometimes he has to keep the plough while I pull it instead of a buffalo. Th. is our bread-winner because her mother has problem with a rib nerve and cannot do heavy work. Th. has to work in the field while helping me to work at a brick kiln. We can earn about 15,000 dong a day. She likes knitting, embroidery and lace work but can not find a job in our commune. I have to send her to Lao Cai to work for her uncle as a housemaid, with daily meals and a monthly payment of 100,000 dong. She cried very much the day she left. She does not want to drop out and live far from home. However, I cannot do anything because we are too poor.

Another case, Ly Thi Th. from Quang Son also has to drop out from school to earn money by working at a quarry to help her mother taking care of her younger brothers and sisters and her sick grand-mother.

Findings from the personal interviews and group interviews show that most of the male school dropouts had been poor learners, while most of the female school dropouts are from impoverished families. Girls are keen on studying, more industrious and perform better than boys. Many girls do well at school but have to stop schooling because their families cannot afford the school fee. After dropping out from school, the girls in Phuc Xa only assist their mothers in selling things or doing handicrafts. We have interviewed some girls, such as Ly Thi Th., 16, from Quang Son, who dropped out at grade 6 to work at the quarry; and Tran Thi V., 16, who dropped out at grade 9, also to work at the quarry. Each of them at the quarry earns 20,000 – 25,000 dong a day. There are similar cases in La Son. Tran Thi Bich T., 16 years old, who had done well at school but had to drop out at grade 9, is now working as a housemaid in Lao Cai province. She is provided with meals and paid 100,000 dong a month. Dinh Thi L., 12 years old, who had done well at school, particularly in mathematics, dropped out at grade 5. Her elder sister and her two younger brothers also dropped out at grade 4. She is learning embroidery and earns only 2,000 dong a day. Nguyen Thi D., a 13 years' old girl who dropped out at grade 2, has become re-illiterate. She is now involved in embroidery and earns 1000-2000 dong a day. Sometimes she catches shellfish for sale and earns an additional 3,000 dong each time. Nguyen Thi Th., 11 years old, dropped out at grade 5 and is doing farm work and housework. Dinh Thi L., 14 years old, dropped out at grade 6 and now catches shellfish for sale and do farm work.

Nguyen Thi Th., from Phuc Xa ward, is 15 years old. She dropped out at grade 6, and now assists her mother selling food on the street. Vu Thi L., 16 years old, dropped out at grade 5. Her family has just migrated here from other locality. She is selling boiled embryo-duck eggs and shellfish at Phuc Xa market. Most of school dropouts in Phuc Xa Ward, Hanoi are from poor and immigrant families.

Vu Thi L.'s family migrated to Ha Noi from Hung Yen province in 1990. They bought a 16m² -room in a small lane of Residential Group 66. There are 8 members in her family: her parents, her 5 brothers and sisters and herself. Her father is a construction worker. Her mother sells boiled embryo-duck eggs and shellfish near their house. Like herself, her elder sister dropped out after grade 5 and now also sells boiled embryo-duck eggs and shellfish near their house. Her two younger sisters are attending the 4th and 5th charity classes run by the ward. Her two youngest sister and brother are under school age. She said:

Everyday, we get up at dawn, and boil eggs for sale for breakfast. We take turn to go home for lunch and rest. Then we continue selling till 9.30 p.m. Sometimes having few customers, we have to stay until 11 p.m. I make a profit of only 100 -150 on each egg I sell. I even make no profit or loss if some eggs are broken. In a day I can earn about 10,000 dong. I want to continue schooling, and only wish to finish lower secondary school, and then I will learn tailoring and work in a garments factory. But my family cannot afford.

3.1.4. The Children's Attitude To Their Labor Activities

We have looked at children's contribution to household income, and their actual participation in different types of work. We now try to find out their attitude toward the work they do to contribute to household income. Our findings show that 37.7 % of the child interviewees say they are satisfied with their work, 17.0 % say they feel it is a normal practice, 7.9 % are not satisfied, 4.4 % don't know, and 33 % have no comment. We can see that most of the children are satisfied with their contribution work. It shows their awareness of helping their families. However, the number of children who 'are not satisfied' makes up a rather large percentage. It shows that some of these children are forced to do heavy work beyond their physical strength or unsuitable work. It makes them not satisfied and not interested in the work. Similar percentages of children (around 63 %) from Ha Noi and Thai Nguyen feel satisfied with their work. The figure in Ha Nam is only 37 %. In order to understand these figures, let's look at types of work that children in the 3 project sites often do. Children from Ha Nam make up the highest rate (60.6 %) in 'making money by their own'. If type of work also decides the children's attitude, we can see that 'making money by their own' is a hard and unstable job, which receives less family assistance, so less children are satisfied with this type of job.

3.2. Children And Education

Education is one of children's basic rights. It is also considered a prime condition to develop future civilians, an important factor to improve individuals' quality of life and to improve people's general knowledge and social development. In Vietnam, primary education is compulsory and free, and the country is targeting the universalization of lower secondary education in all provinces, wherever the

conditions allow. The state provides assistance to children with disabilities and children from needy families to access education. Dropping-out is a phenomenon that starts occurring in the classes of the secondary school. Some of the objective factors affecting school dropouts include family's financial constraints, social pressure and distance between their houses and schools. Conditions are better where an active local committee has an eye for the problem and takes initiatives, such as the classes of compassion, as the chairman of the People's Committee of Phuc Xa Ward explained:

In the past many children dropped out from school. The ward has provided free education to the needy children and gave them desks and chairs to facilitate their study at home. We has raised fund for their summer activities, including camping and excursions. The precinct has set up a *class of compassion*, which provides free education for 136 street children. Teachers are pensioners who volunteer to teach without pay.

Expenditure on education makes up a large percentage of total spending in some households. Primary education is free, but when the child is at the lower secondary school level, parents have to pay 180.000 dong per year for school fee, 40.000 dong for the school building, 50.000 dong for body and health insurances, 50.000 dong for parents' fund, 100.000 dong per year for Learning Promotion Fund, and 9.000 dong per month for Youth Union or Pioneer Brigade. In Hanoi, in addition to school fee defined by the State, parents have to pay other sums depending on the school and fee for tutorial classes, which monthly can add up to 100.000 per subject per child.

The reality shows that although the Vietnamese State has been very concerned with child education by issuing relevant laws, policies and by law documents, there remain many constraints in implementing these laws and policies. Availability of schools is the pre-condition to ensure a good education. As schools and classes are short in many communities, the children have to hustle in narrow classrooms, with poor light and sanitation conditions. In some locations, the pupils have to learn in 3 'shifts' a day, and have to sit in poorly equipped classes with only some desks and seats and a blackboard.

Teachers play a very important role in ensuring a good teaching and learning quality. Over the last few years, primary and secondary schools have received a contingent of young, healthy and well-trained teachers to replace the old ones. Every summer vacation, these young school teachers have access to short-term training courses which enable them to update their knowledge to meet requirements of the education reform by the Ministry of Education and Training. Discussing the question on 'teaching quality', parents from Quang Son commune said:

Over the last few years, with young teachers coming from Thai Nguyen, the teaching quality here has been improved. We feel at ease when we hear the children commending their teachers. During parents' meetings, the school also reported to us about the teaching and learning quality, which has been improved year after year.

There appears to be a general eagerness among the pupils to learn. Especially maths and Vietnamese are popular subjects, far ahead of other subjects such as history and foreign languages. According to one study (Democratic Research Institute 1997: 5), respectively 88 % and 85 % of both boys and girls mentioned maths as a favourite subject. Their desire for knowledge is such that, according to the same study, 67 % of the boys and 59 % of the girls attended tutorial classes. The non-attendance by the other boys and girls is of course also influenced by the fact, as mentioned earlier, quite a number of children have to do all kinds of household chores and jobs. Whereas in the richer social class 78 % of the children attended tutorial classes, in the poor families, it was only 16 % (Democratic Youth Institute 1997: 8). But in general, if given the chance, pupils are interested to go to school and benefit from the teachers.

Overall the impression was that pupils were reasonably satisfied with the commitment of the teachers. A group of schoolgirls from Phuc Xa lower secondary school stated their opinion as follows: 'Some teachers are interesting, some are dull, but most of them are *interesting teachers*.'

3.2.1. Financial Constraints, Dropouts and Interest in Education

As our sample has focussed mainly on poor households, the number of households having school dropouts makes up a rather large percentage. When we asked whether any children aged between 6-16 in the household had dropped out or were not going to school, as many as 23.0 % of them said yes. Of these households, 74.1 % had 1 dropout, 22.1 % had 2, and 3.7 % had even 3 dropouts. Most of the dropouts are aged between 12-16.

The higher the education of the parents, the lower is the rate of school dropouts. There is no dropout in households where parents holding university or college degrees. The rate of school dropouts is 22.7 % and 16.7 % in households where parents completed lower secondary and upper secondary education respectively. This rate is 33.3 % in households where parents only completed primary education.

Investigation of the relation between the household's financial situation and school dropout also shows that 100 % children from hungry and very poor households drop out of school or have never been to school; the rate of dropouts is 26 % among poor households and 16.7 % among medium households. We didn't see dropouts among children of well-off households. Obviously the household financial condition has a direct impact on the rate of school dropouts. There are many reasons preventing children from having access to education, but financial constraint is obviously one of the key factors, as the following case of Th. indicates.

Th. used to be a good child when she was at home. She studied hard and went to school even in rainy or stormy days. She also helped her two younger brothers in study. She did housework voluntarily and only wished to continue studying at upper secondary school. Unfortunately, we could not afford her to

do so. She had to drop out from school and is now working as a housemaid for her uncle in Lao Cai province. She cried a lot on the day she went. She did not want to drop out and live far from home, but we are very poor. We have no choice.

In the interview we had we Th. we learned that he had finished grade 9th and graduated from lower secondary school. He could not continue studying because there was not enough money. So we asked him whether his parents forced him to stop:

My father said we were facing financial constraints and persuaded me to leave school. Now I do farm work such as transplanting and harvesting rice, and catch crabs in the field during slack season. That is all I do, I do not go out and earn money.

Most of the households intend to let their children continue schooling as long as the children can. One of our concerns is to investigate which level of education the parents intend to let their children reach.

In reality, most of parents think their children's education is important. They try to ensure that their children can study as far as the children are capable of (73.2 % for boys and 78.6 % for girls). Some households said their children's education also depends on family's financial situation, namely their children will have to drop out if they could not afford their schooling. Obviously, educational orientation depends on different objective reasons, not only parents' will. However, in some cases, parents' viewpoint is a decisive factor. From a group of parents in Phuc Xa and in La Son, we collected the following comments:

Although we are poor we have to bring our children up. Their education is our priority and we have to support them. We should rather go without many things to let them keep up with their friends.

Their learning condition remains poor but we have to encourage them. We manage to let our children keep on studying because they learn very well. My child is at grade 8th, special class for gifted students at Nguyen Cong Tru School, and has performed well for 8 years. It will be a pity if he drops out.

I wish that my children will continue to go to school as long as they can. They are still very young, if they don't go to school but loitering about, then we shall lose them some days.

We invest in our children's education to help them gain knowledge. If they cannot enter university and will stay home to work in the field they will lead a different, more cultural life. In case they pass university entrance exam, we still cannot support their further study. Some tons of rice are of great value in rural area, but their value is not enough to meet all the expenses.

The regional differences are interesting. Of the households having children aged between 6-16 who have never gone to school or have dropped out from school, 57.1 % are in Ha Nam, 35.7 % in Ha Noi and 7.1 % in the more remote and backward Thai Nguyen. Whereas there are no households in Quang Son having

two school dropouts, the figures in Hanoi and Ha Nam are 12.5 % and 31.3 % respectively.

We also found that among households having similar financial situation, parents from Quang Son still try their best to let their children go to school, while those from La Son seem to be more easy-going in letting their children drop out. Answering the question as to why, some parents from La Son, like this 42-year-old woman, said:

Many graduates in Hanoi cannot find jobs. If we let our children learn further, it will be very costly and will reach at nothing. It is better to let them drop out and work at home so that they will earn money.

Meanwhile many parents from Quang Son maintain that they should let their children continue schooling to be better than their parents and will be able change their life in the future. Most of the dropouts are from ethnic minority groups, particularly the H'mong. H'mong is the poorest group in the locality as they still lead a nomadic life. Until recently, the H'mong people have been helped by the authorities to stabilize their lives. Although the State has subsidized their children's schooling, many households still ask their children to drop out to work on hilly fields or go to forests to collect firewood and other forest products because they are too poor.

3.2.2. Gender Inequality in Education.

Our findings show that boys and girls from the 3 project sites all have a similar learning capacity. Boys are said to be intelligent, understanding the lesson quickly, but that they are often engrossed in playing. Consequently, their learning performances are not always the same; some perform well, but in general they are at average level. Girls are said to be slower but hard learning and industrious, and their performances are often better than boys. The Head Masters of two secondary schools and two primary schools in Quang Son and La Son all agreed that schoolgirls perform better and make up a large percentage among excellent students. Parents in Quang Son said while girls usually take textbooks along to study when tending buffaloes, boys prefer playing football or fighting. Unfortunately, those girls cannot always continue higher education. Partly it is because their parents are too poor, and partly because of their parents' preference for boys.

Table 3.6 shows that 5.4 % of the households explicitly intend to let their sons enjoy tertiary education while not any household gave such an explicit target to their daughters. In poor families with many children, it is a common practice to ask the daughters to drop out to take care of housework. Depending on their age, they can assist their parents in looking after their younger brothers or sisters, cooking, selling goods, tending buffalos or cutting grass.

Table 3.6. Aspirations for Levels of Educational Achievement

	Son	Daughter
Primary school	0.9	1.0
Lower secondary school	8.9	7.8
Upper secondary school	2.7	4.9
College, university	5.4	0.0
Depend on the child's ability	73.2	78.6
Depend on family's financial capacity	8.9	7.8

A 11-year-old girl in La Son did stop going to school after grade 5, and we asked her why she dropped out: 'I have to take care of my younger siblings and harvesting rice.' Her younger sister, Hien also dropped out, while she was in grade 3 in order to help transporting rice. Her younger brothers did not: 'They have to go to school. Boys must have career.'

Many girls had to drop out at grade 11 or 12 so as to give the opportunity for their brothers. Despite their sadness and crying, their parents didn't change their mind. Some girls even think it is their responsibility to do so. A 16-year-old girl in Quang Son explained:

There are 5 people in my family, my grandmother, my mother, my two younger brothers and I. My father died in 1990. I'm the elder daughter. I had to drop out from school to work and help my mother support my two brothers' schooling. I work at the quarry and earn 22,000 dong per day. I give my mother 12.000 dong and keep 10.000 dong. When there is no work at the quarry, I work for hire in picking tea leaves and earn 10.000 dong per day. I don't want to leave school, but my brothers shouldn't be forced to drop out because they are boys.

3.2.2. Interest in Studies

Our findings on learning result show that 75.2 % of the child interviewees said 'knowledge obtained from school is very helpful in life'; 21.7 % said 'helpful'; 1.3 % said they 'obtain nothing after learning', and 1.9 % said 'don't know'. So we can see that most of the children think knowledge provided by the school is helpful in life. This is an important sign showing a certain success of school education. The comparison of the children's evaluation (by age) of school education benefit provides the following results.

Table 3.7. Children's Assessment of Education (by age, in percentage)

	9 to 12	13 to 16
Very helpful	80.0	72.2
A little helpful	18.3	23.7

Obtain nothing after learning	0.8	1.5
Don't know	0.8	2.5

Table 3.7 shows that more young children think highly of school education than older children. Learning environment and teachers' attitudes are very important for the children as they will help formulate in them a fondness of learning and their personality.

Comparison of the children's evaluation (by site) of school education benefit provides the following results. The level of positive assessment was the lowest in Nam Ha where only 67 % considered education very helpful. In Ha Noi and Thai Nguyen it was 78 % and 89 % respectively. Whereas 2,8 % and 0.9 % in respectively Nam Ha and Thai Nguyen did not see any advantage in learning, not any child in Hanoi thought so. It suggests that most children are aware of the importance of learning, and that in Hanoi particularly, teaching and learning methods and conditions in Hanoi's schools are better than those in other provinces. However rural children are also fond of learning. We found this fact after interviewing the children, like this 14-year-old girl in Quang Son commune:

I wish to complete upper secondary school, but don't know whether I can enter a university or not. I have learnt a lot at school. I don't have much time for entertainment. I study all the time, even during breaks. I want to have higher education to find a good job. I don't know whether my parents can afford my learning. If they can, I'll continue my study, if not, I'll stop.

Poverty has forced many children to drop out and even those who are at school are not sure about their future. For this reason, knowledge they gained at school is very precious not only to look for a job but also for their future life.

Besides learning, vocational training is also very important in child education. It provides children with not only technical know-how but also skills and interest in working. Job training is an important step to prepare them for a job to earn their living, especially those who are not able to continue education at upper secondary school. Interviews show that parents may not pay sufficient attention to job orientation for their children. Only 15.4 % said they have oriented their children in future jobs, while 81.2 % said it is up to their children to decide and 3.2 % say they have no orientation yet. Labor redundancy in rural areas also prevents parents from planning their children's future. They have the tendency of waiting for the state to help them out:

We will be very happy only if State-owned enterprises hire them on contract, let alone to be included in the regular staff.

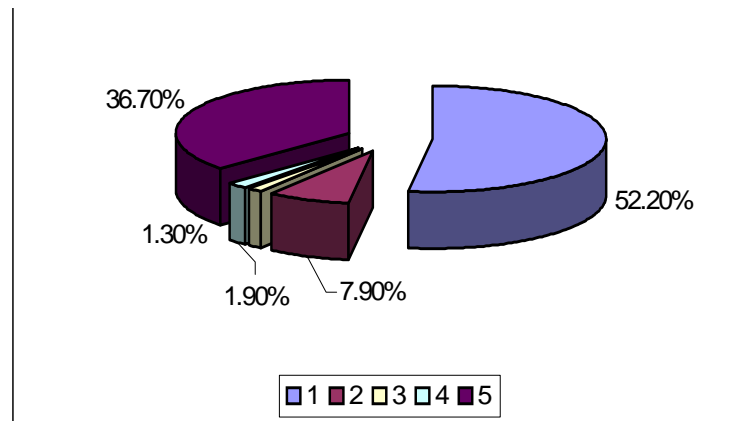
We wish our children have good jobs regardless their educational level. We wish our children can find a job in Thai Nguyen city to be near our home. They will suffer if they work far from home. Any job, anywhere is good.

Interviewing children about vocational training, we find that their schools do not pay adequate attention to this matter, although it is already oriented by State

policies. Only 12.9 % of the child interviewees say they have been provided job training. It is a very modest figure. It shows that traditionally our schools still follow a teaching method, which focuses on theory while neglecting practice.

By sex, we see that girls highly appreciate vocational training than boys. Among those who say vocational training is useful for their life, 38.7 % are boys, and 61.3 % are girls. This is an interesting indicator because it is commonly accepted that boys are more concerned about careers, while girls would consider careers less important than marriage. Obviously, due to the fierce competition in life at present, girls from both rural and urban areas seem to have become more aware of the importance of their social status, and economic independence.

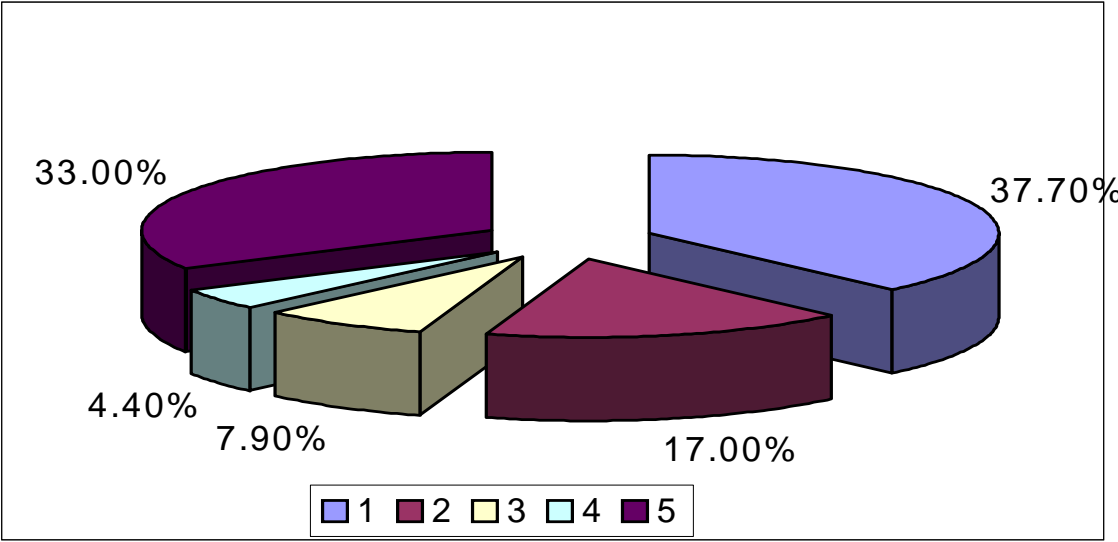
Figure 1. Children contribution to total household income according to their own assessment.



Note:

- 1: Contribution between 10 – 20 %;
- 2: between 30 – 40 %;
- 3: 50 %;
- 4: more than 50 %;
- 5: no contribution.

Figure 2. Children’s attitude to the work they do to contribute to household income



Note:

1 Satisfied; 2 Neutral; 3 Not satisfied; 4 Don't know; 5 No comment

Chapter 4. Children and Health

Child healthcare is defined in Vietnam's Constitution and laws including the Law on Child Care, Protection and Education, the Law on People Health Protection, the Law on Education, the Law on Marriage and the Family, and the Labor Code, Criminal Code and Civil Code.

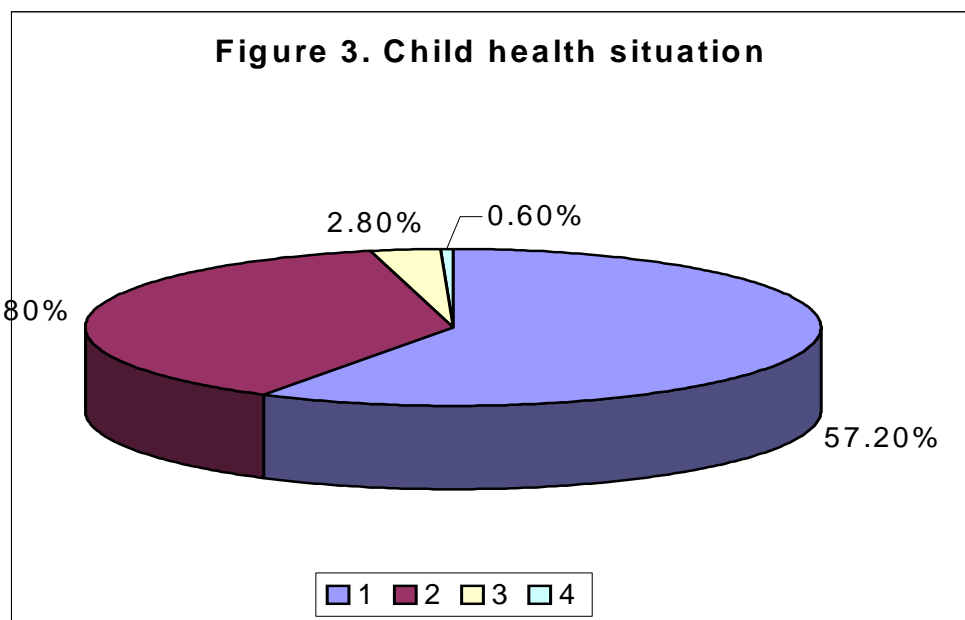
Not only laws but by-law documents also stress the obligations of parents and guardians to abide by regulations on child immunization, childcare during their sickness and guidelines for doctors. Legal documents also mention the obligation to prevent the transmission of contagious diseases to children, and protecting them from a hazardous and risky environment while learning, working and living. However, child healthcare activities depend not only on law enforcement but also responsibilities and practices of the families and society.

According to La Son communal health station, local children usually suffer from common diseases such as catching a cold, pneumonia and diarrhoea. Children aged between 9-16 often have sore throat and pneumonia. Children from impoverished families are more prone to diseases as compared to those of well-off ones. The commune has carried out well preventive measures and as a result, the last 14 years have not seen epidemics such as measles, tetanus, polio and diphtheria occurred.

The commune health station in Quang Son reports that children often suffer from respiratory infections, dental problems, and even malnutrition (37.8%). No epidemics have occurred over the last 10 years. School pupils enjoy free healthcare under health insurance. The health station has sufficient essential medicinal drugs and sells them at prices decided by the district. The station provides free treatment to local children once a year and organized information, education and communication activities to disseminate information on nutrition. As many big hospitals are located in Ha Noi capital, health stations are not set up in wards. However, epidemic prevention activities have been carried out well at living quarters. Information on child nutrition has regularly been covered by the mass media.

4.1. Good Health

Observing children from needy families, we found that they are smaller than other children of the same ages, and that their complexion is often pale and dark. It appeared as an indication of their families' financial situation and their living conditions. Among the child interviewees, 57.2% maintain that they have a good health, 36.8% say their health is average, 2.8% poor, and 0.6% have disabilities.



Note: 1-good health; 2-average; 3-poor health; 4-having disabilities

These figures show that in general, the percentage of children with good health is not much higher than that of children with average health. However, only 2.8% of the children maintain they have a poor health. Looking at project sites, we also find that children from different sites have different assessments of their health.

Table 4.1. The Health Perception of Children

	Ha Noi	Ha Nam	Thai Nguyen
Good health	54,2	37,5	82,7
Average	42,7	55,0	16,4
Poor health	3,1	4,8	0,9
With disabilities	0,0	1,9	0,0
Total	100,0	100,0	100,0

We can see that the children from Thai Nguyen who maintain to have a good health make up the highest percentage. Meanwhile the rate is quite low in Ha Nam and average in Ha Noi. The analysis of economic conditions and access to healthcare institutions show that the Ha Noi children are more advantaged than those in Thai Nguyen. However children's health is also affected by other factors such as the natural environment, family circumstance, housing, labor, moral state, closeness to nature, and family care during sickness. For example, Ha Noi does not provide a good physical environment for children, because of its narrow space and houses, heavy pollution, dense population, dirty and busy streets. Children from needy families also run short of nutrition. All these have a negative impact on children's health.

Meanwhile, the urbanization process has taken place in Ha Nam. Dense population and polluted environment also affect the healthy air in rural areas. Moreover, the rate of children making a living by themselves is also higher than that among Ha Noi and Thai Nguyen children, so in general children's health is also poorer. Overwork, lack of nutrition and competition in making a living all affect their health. In Thai Nguyen, the people live closer to nature, and the healthy and spacious natural environment have a good impact on children's health.

4.2. Proper Care During Sickness.

Findings show that as many as 86.5% of the child interviewees say they have been sick in one way or the other. It is a high rate. Most of them, as this 12-year-old boy in Phuc Xa, say they received good care from parents and relatives during sickness:

Sometimes I have a headache, high temperature or stomach ache. I have to stay home and cannot go out. My mother buys me rice noodle and gives me medicines, while my elder sister boils medicinal herbs for me to inhale the steam, or gives me a bottle of hot water to compress by belly. When I drip sweat, then I recover.

The diaries we kept illustrate how families took care of the children and saw to it that they took their medicines. The care given by health workers accounts for a very low percentage of the illnesses (0.9%). It means parents only take their children to the health station or calling a doctor when they are seriously ill, and give them self-medication if they are not very sick. It shows that the family plays an important role in child health care and protection. To have a deeper analysis on this issue, we put the following question to parents: 'When your children are sick, where you will take them to for treatment?' We got the following answers:

To the commune health station: 46.4%

To district's hospital or health center: 52.3%

To private doctors: 21.9%

To the herbalist: 6.6%

To let the child recover without treatment: 0%

To the worship sorcerer: 0%

Self-medication: 20.7%

The difference between information provided by the children and parents can be explained easily. The interviewed children are aged between 9-16. At these ages they are growing up and not often sick. If they are sick, it is only common sickness, and can be treated at home with some medicines. Meanwhile the information provided by parents covers a wider range of ages, when the parents have to take care of their children since their birth and often get sick.

The above figures show that parents are concerned with their children's health. No sick children are let to recover without treatment. Parents trust in state-owned health facilities, with the highest level being the district hospital, then commune health station, only the serious cases are brought to Ha Noi. The head of La Son commune health station described the functioning of the health care institutions and their care for children:

Here we do not enjoy the policy of providing free medical check up and treatment for poor people and poor children. However, we only charge the children with the medicine not with the examination. If the child is seriously sick, we shall refer him to the higher level. There is no private pharmacy in our commune, but only two oriental medicament shops. Every month, we receive about 10 patients aged between 9–16. Children of this age group are not often sick.

The head of Quang Son commune health station explained the different options which parents exert, for example to recurrence to doctors as well as herbalists, as follows:

There is a private pharmacy, and 22 herbalists operating in our commune. Parents are more concerned with their children's health. When their children are sick, the serious patients will be carried in a hammock to the commune health station. If the children are slightly sick, parents will buy medicines from the pharmacy to treat them or take them to the herbalists. Local herbalists here are specialized, either in rheumatism or stomach ache, or others. However the H'mong ethnic minority people still let their patients to be cured at home.

Comparison between these two sites show that Quang Son has many herbalists, while there is almost none in La Son. It reflects a fact that mountainous and highland people still trust in experienced herbalists, particularly ethnic minority ones. In the provinces as well as in Ha Noi, oriental medicine has proved its effectiveness, which can cure many cases that western medicine cannot. That is why the combination of western and oriental medicines is the best practice in Vietnam at present.

4.3. Self – medication

Self-medication is practiced quite often, and for various reasons. One reason is poverty. In the past healthcare was free, and children from all households were equal to access public healthcare. Nowadays, patients have to pay. It causes numerous difficulties to the poor. Meanwhile, children from impoverished households often get sick more often than those from the rich because of poor meals, overwork and poor living conditions. Many parents resort to self-medication when their children suffer from common diseases. Those who are too poor cannot afford buying medicines and can only use medicinal herbs from the garden or sick help from the commune health station (the station cannot help much, and if the patients can not be cured they cannot do anything further). As

many as 20.7% of the interviewees hold that they resort to self-medication when their children are sick.

Ms Nguyen Thi N. from An Ninh village in La Son said: ‘What about our spending? It is mainly on the children’s medicines. I have 3 children, the youngest son suffers from meningitis when he was in grade 1. Everyday over the last two years, I pay 10,000 dong for his medicines. The other children sometimes catch a cold or diarrhea and I can cure them by myself. It is too much for N. to pay for her son’s medicament. But N. is anyway luckier than Ms Dinh Thi L. from Dong Van village:

All members in my family are sick. My eldest son, Th. suffers from kidney gravels, the second son, H. from rheumatism and I, a tumor. Both of them have to drop out from school. My husband had died of kidney gravels. Every month their medicament would cost some hundreds of thousands of Dong. Our health is poor. We farm 9 ‘sao’ of rice field and sell bread, but can not afford our food, let alone medicines. I cannot do anything but wait for heaven.

Self-medication is also based on practical lessons learned from the past. Children do get a temperature, once in a while, a number of parents said, and doctors are called even for such small things: ‘The doctor is called for just a slight illness. In the past our parents never called a doctor, but we still live until today’, said a 40-year-old woman from Quang Son. In reality there are not many parents think like that but some aspects in their attitude have a negative impact on their children’s health.

Having many children, or lack knowledge of raising children, prevent them from giving their children good care even during their early childhood. Comparing parents’ education level and treatment of their sick children, we found that among those parents, who give self-medication, none have tertiary education, 11.5% have secondary education, and the remaining 88.5% have their education lower than secondary. Obviously, the higher education the parents have, the more awareness they will have of the necessity to be very cautious about the health of children.

The examination by the doctors and treatment prescribed by them are not always convenient, especially in terms of money. Referring to the children’s self evaluation of their health (mentioned above), we found that the health of children in Ha Noi is poorer from those in Thai Nguyen. It seems bizarre as Ha Noi people have more access to health information and facilities and Ha Noi parents should be more aware of child healthcare than those from other provinces. However the costs of health examination and treatment are too high for poor people in Ha Noi. Hospital procedures take them much time, many constraints remain in health insurance payment, and many other negative practices force them to resort to self-medication. Meanwhile people from La Son and Quang Son all highly appreciated the services provided by their commune health stations. Most of the locally made medicinal drugs are not too costly. The most difficulty is the shortage of modern equipment and well-performing doctors. Different types of

households (nuclear, extended) also have different choices in selecting health services for their children. Let's look at the following table.

Table 4.2. Types of households and their selection of health services

	Nuclear household	Extended household
Commune health station	53,0	14,3
District hospital	53,0	53,6
Private doctor	21,7	17,9
Herbalist	7,0	7,1
Self medication	20,2	21,4

Table 4.2 shows that more nuclear households prefer commune health station than extended ones. There is no big difference between them in selecting other health services. It is because heads of nuclear households are young, and they trust in State-owned health facilities. So when their children get sick they think, first of all, of commune health station. Meanwhile in extended households, grandparents' experience can help treat the sick children better.

4.4. Food Satisfaction

Nutrition provided by daily meals is one of important factors affecting children's health and their development. First let's see how the children evaluate their family meals. As many as 80.2% of the interviewed children from all the 3 areas say they are satisfied with their daily meals in their families.

Comparison between project areas shows a little difference in children's comments on their meals. In Ha Noi, 73% of the interviewed children are satisfied with their family meals, while in Ha Nam it is 82.1% and in Thai Nguyen, it is 84.8%. The concept 'satisfied' is also limited because Vietnamese children, particularly those from poor households, are not demanding. The need also depends on their actual living condition. For example, children from poor households can be satisfied with only sufficient rice, vegetables and a little meat or fish. Children in urban areas and from richer households will have higher and stricter demand. Findings of our survey show that less children in Hanoi are satisfied with their family's meals than those from the two provinces. This case can be explained as the rural children are less demanding than urban ones, not because they have better food.

The information provided by the individual interviews and group interviews are fairly similar. During our stay in the different areas, we noticed that the quality and quantity of the food-intake have improved. It shows that households' living standards have improved considerably in the national economic development process. In general, rural households are still food self-sufficient. Food is produced, collected or caught (rice, meat, fish, crabs, shellfish, shrimps, and vegetables). However, the intake has increased and some households also buy foods from the market to diversify their meals. Households from Phuc Xa say

that their main foods are vegetables, tofu and sometimes meat and fish (on an average they have meat three days a week). A 4-member household spends about 600,000 dong on meals. From a group of girls from Quang Son, we recorded the following statements:

My family has three meals a day.

We usually eat two meals. I don't need breakfast, I still feel well. We mainly eat rice and vegetables.

My family has meat very often, every two meals.

My family eats more fish, either buy or catch.

Food is provided by ourselves, sometimes we buy. We have enough and good food. The whole family has the same food. Only the youngest child has special dishes.

The children usually, however, do not have special dishes. They eat the same food as parents. Parents, in La Son for example, also acknowledge they don't have special dishes for their children because the meals now are much better than before.

Households in the village all eat three meals a day. We are doing farm work, so we still feel hungry even with 3 meals a day. We have rice for breakfast too.

We can produce enough meat, fish, eggs and tofu for ourselves. We also plant enough vegetables.

We have to buy only meat. We have meat twice a week, and crabs, fish and vegetables for the other meals.

We eat as much rice as we can because we now have sufficient rice. It is much better than 5 years ago.

The data, however, also show that some children say they have not enough food. The information is provided by children from lower income households. The children having not enough food in Thai Nguyen account for 23%, in Ha Noi, 11.1% and in Ha Nam, 5.3%.

Table 4.3. Reasons for Meal Dissatisfaction

	Ha Noi	Ha Nam	Thai Nguyen
Not enough food	11,1	5,3	23,0
Foods are not tasty	85,2	31,6	47,1
Don't like the food	3,7	52,6	23,0
Other reasons	0,0	10,5	5,9
Total	100,0	100,0	100,0

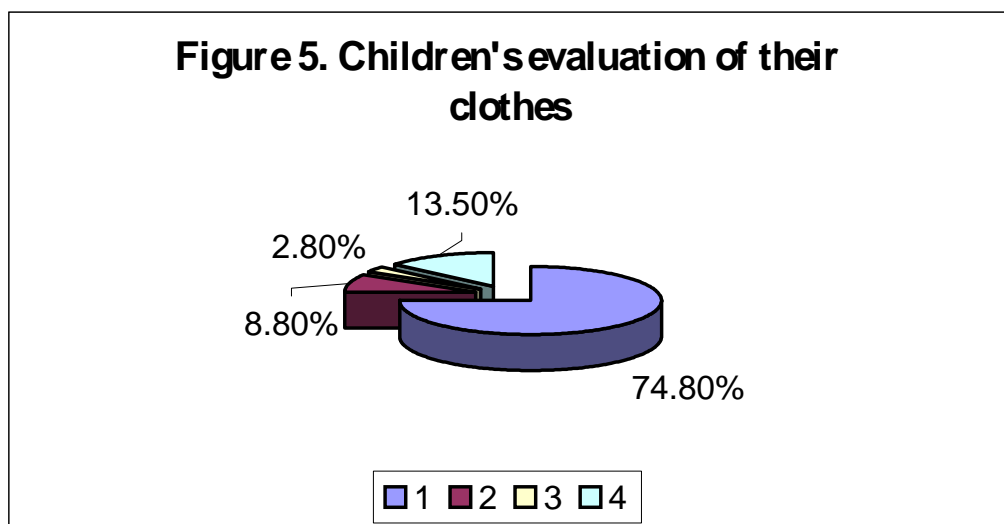
Table 4.3 shows that as the financial situation of Ha Noi households is better, and their children are not satisfied with their meals mostly because the foods are not tasty. In Thai Nguyen, the living condition is more difficult, and the children are not satisfied with their meals is mainly because they have not enough food. Meanwhile, many children from Ha Nam say they are not satisfied as they don't like the meals which they consider monotonous and not tasty.

4.5. Clothes

Besides their meals, clothing for children is also very important indicator of children's comfort. The findings show that 86.5 % of the child interviewees say they have sufficient clothing and 74.8 % say they are satisfied with what they have. However, 2.8 % of the children say their clothes are poorer than their friends' and 6.0 % say their clothes are not good-looking.

Similar to food, the demand of children for clothes also depends on their family circumstances. It is important that they have sufficient warm clothes during winter and have at least 3 – 4 sets of clothes to change during summer. The girls now have sets of clothes made of flowered cloth to wear at home and they like them very much. They also have school uniform. In general their demand for clothing has been met. It conforms to the findings of the survey on household spending when 56.1% of parents say most of their spending is for their children's healthcare, meals and clothing. However, some children are still not satisfied with their clothes as they don't like them and they are not good-looking. These children sometimes have to wear old clothes of their parents, elder brothers and sisters.

Note: 1-satisfied; 2-not satisfied; 3-Don't know; 4-Don't answer



Conclusion

Like the educational issues, health and care are also sensitive matters. Although, conditions have been improved in comparison with five years ago because the number of poor families has come down and because of some changes in health policies. Presently, the medical network has been widened to the village, the quality of the physician has developed, and the cost for examination and treatment at the village infirmary are suitable to the poor and average families' income.

Medical services (both established by state or private) have increased and have become more sophisticated. Even poor people are able to choose their own medical service. For children, the government has issued special policies. According to the law of Protection, Care and Education for children in 1991 (Article 9), children less than 6 years old are offered first care and treatment for free at the medical state enterprise. The government has also issued some decree, exempting a part of hospital fee when people are examined at the medical state enterprises. The people exempted from a part of hospital fees included the following types:

- ✓ Children suffering from special serious difficult condition such as: disabled, schizophrenia, epilepsy, leprosy, orphan and too poor (i.e. children of the extreme poverty families, which constitute about 30% of the families),
- ✓ Children living in the high mountainous areas as decided by the Committee for Ethnic Nationalities and Mountainous Area,
- ✓ Children following parents to go reclaiming virgin soil in the mountain area to establish new economic region for at least 2 year after arriving,
- ✓ Children living on the support from the government who have special difficulties do not have to pay medical fees when they are treated at the medical state enterprise.

All of them have been granted a medical insurance card or certificate of free medical examination and treatment. In the rural areas, thanks to the fresh food and better quality, good living environment, children can have various sport activities and have better strength than children living in the cities. However, the risk of getting disease is higher because the health care condition in rural areas is not as modern and timely as in the city. On the other hand, the knowledge of children health care in rural families is lower than in the cities.

Chapter 5. Leisure and Daily Life

Physical and spiritual lives are indispensable aspects of humankind. The Vietnamese state and people deem it their responsibility to take care of children's physical and spiritual life. However, as the country is still poor, it is not easy to provide children with healthy and cultural entertainment so that they can fully develop their physical and mental powers. Vietnam's laws enforced at present define that children have the right to entertainment and specific regulations have been issued to ensure them of that right. We come to the following comments on the implementation of this principle after investigating into this issue at all the three project sites.

5.1. Playgrounds and children clubs

The shortage of playgrounds and cultural and sport centres for children is a general phenomenon in both urban and rural areas in Vietnam. Urban people are witnessing the mushrooming of new hotels and houses but not many schools, entertainment centres, and cultural and sport clubs for children. Newspapers in Hanoi once reported on an absurd practice that the Kim Dong cinema in the capital, exclusively reserved for children, showed adult films, with a notice 'children prohibited'. Ironically, the Cinema Director even said he was forced to do so because films for children were lacking and he had almost no audience when he showed these films.

Due to the shortage of playgrounds, children have to play football and badminton on the streets, and in many cases, causing traffic accidents for road users and even themselves. The school-yards are usually small while the number of pupils is large. The lesson interval is rather short, only 5-10 minutes break is not enough for the children to relax. In summer, swimming pools are crowded with people and the water there is not quite clean. As a result, the urban children have the only entertainment, playing computer games or chatting in the Internet. The image of children with heavy short-sighted glasses sitting in front of computers in small rooms for hours is really a matter of parents' concern. In their eyes, it is not a healthy game to develop children's mental and physical power. On the contrary, the children might be negatively influenced by violence and sexual pictures on the net.

In rural area, the land area reserved for playgrounds is larger but the playground is often a deserted and uneven ground. The children can play football or traditional games such as jumping the rope, tug-of-war, flying the kites and so on. They may swim in the ponds or rivers when feeling hot, in either clean or dirty water. This kind of natural 'swimming pool' is very unsafe and many children have been drowned.

In such situation, children now mature very early and grow 'older' than their age. Their balanced development can only be formulated and developed through

playing. However, nowadays adults have forced them to study or work too hard beyond and are not concerned about their time to play. Living among nature is an indispensable desire of children. On holidays, they like going to parks, botanical gardens, and zoos or happily join camping held by the school, commune or ward. This fact is acknowledged by many rural children. A 12-year-old girl from La Son had to drop out from school as her family was too poor. Her parents forced her to work in the field and learn embroidery and lacework to earn money. Asked what she liked doing best, she answered that she liked cutting grass because she had a chance to play in the field. She hated embroidering most because she had to lock herself in her small and shabby house. She wished very much to become a goal keeper of the National Women Football Team, but currently she has no chance for training.

Our findings show that although local authorities and social organizations have been concerned with child care and education, they are still not able to mobilize sufficient necessary resources for these activities. Many parents have complained that children’s existing cultural and entertainment centers are poorly equipped. They say local authorities have paid attention to children’s spiritual life and cultural activities, but it is limited to special holidays and New Year Days and such events as the Mid-Autumn festival, International Children’s Day, and sports activities for the children during their summer vacation; 87 % of the parents support their children in joining these activities. Similarly 79 % of the parents say the authorities organize children’s camping and picnic in summer and most of the parents encourage their children to participate. We received similar information though interviewing children. These are good initiatives, but it also shows that in most time of the year, the children manage and organize their playing activities by themselves.

5.2. Leisure Time

We now analyze the time children spend on playing. Looking at their learning timetable, we see that their leisure time can be divided into two periods: during school year and in summer holidays.

Table 5.1: Children’s playing time (%)

	During school year	In summer holidays
Less than one hour	17.9	6.3
1 - 2 hours	51.5	7.7
3 - 4 hours	25.7	33.7
Over 4 hours	4.9	52.3

According to the table, the time for playing is different in school year and in summer holidays: 52.3 % of the children play more than 4 hours in a summer day comparing with 4.9 % during school time. Almost all children have 1 – 2 hours for playing during school year, but such a short period for playing is too little for their age.

We found no big difference in the time reserved for entertainment between regions: 75 % of children in Ha Noi play 3 hours a day during their summer vacation, while in Ha Nam it is 92.4 %, and in Thai Nguyen it is 88.3 %. Although the difference is not big, we still see that children in Hanoi spend less time for playing than those from the provinces. Girls have to work harder than boys, so they have less time to play (see the statistics in table ‘The children's participation in labor’). Normally, most of the girls are doing simple work such as: housework, taking care of children and some other odd jobs. Those kinds of job are difficult to make money directly in comparison with farming, trading or rice milling. In the three researched areas, most parents and teachers confirm that girls have less time to play than boys do. This situation is happening in many provinces in Vietnam, especially in rural and mountainous areas.

Let us look at a school day, January 31, 2002 of 16-year-old Pham Huyen T., at grade 11, from Phuc Xa. Everyday T. has 30 minutes for a quick nap, and 25 min. for playing. She said when there was a day off she went to her friends' house or played with her younger sister and brother for around 1 hour. Such free time is too limited for a pupil at this age. As the children grow up, they are expected to take on more household responsibilities.

6.00 a.m.:	getting up
6.00 – 6.30:	washing face and having breakfast
6.35 – 12.00:	study at school
12.30 – 13.00:	have lunch
13.00 – 13.30:	a short nap
13.30 – 16.00:	attend a tutoring class
16.15 – 16.40:	play with her younger sister and brother
16.40 – 17.00:	help father prepare dinner. Her mother sells vegetable and fruits all day (from 5.am to 11.pm)
17.05 – 17.30:	take the meal for her mother
17.30 – 18.00:	have dinner
18.00 – 18.30:	wash dishes and clean the house
18.30 – 19.15:	look after her 90-year-old grandmother
19.20 – 22.00:	study and teach her younger sister and brother
22.05	: go to bed

Individual cases may show a different pattern. Later, in table 5.3, we shall give one example of the day of a younger boy named Trieu Van G. Most children when they are growing up said that their free time is limited. They had to do many things. Understanding their families' situation make them more and more

responsible to work to support their families. Children either have been taught or themselves have learned from the behaviour of others that it one ought to contribute to work in the household, apart from working hard for school.

5.3. Playing

First, let's review children's activities in their free time. These activities are almost the same during school time and summer holidays, but the time and levels are different.

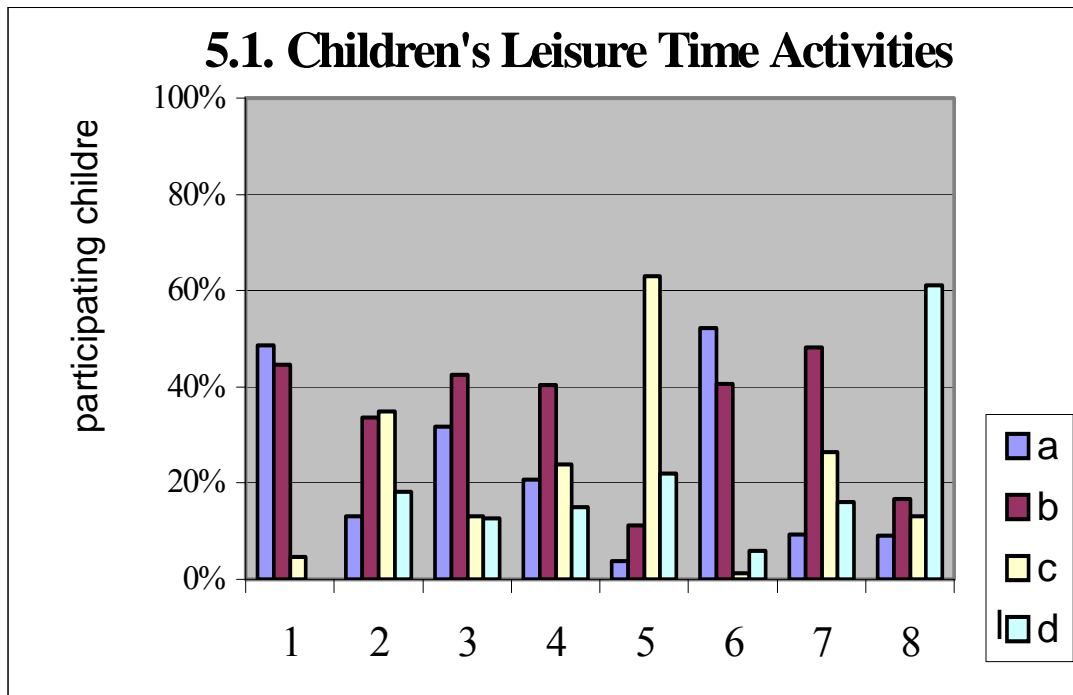
Table 5.2: Children's activities in their free time (%)

	Daily	Sometimes	Don't do	No answer
Watch TV, video	48.7	44.7	4.7	0.0
Listen to radio	13.2	33.6	34.9	18.2
Read book, newspaper	31.8	42.5	13.2	12.6
Play sports	20.8	40.3	23.9	15.1
Play computer games	3.8	11.3	62.9	22.0
Play with friends	52.2	40.6	1.3	6.0
Sleep	9.4	48.1	26.4	16.0

The table shows the children spend most of their free time to play with friends. Friends here are their classmates or children in the neighborhood. Those who have to work have friends at their work place. Children play together and share happiness and sadness. They develop characters and social relations through good time with friends.

Watching TV is the second activity that children like to do. It can be said that watching TV is the most popular type of entertainment of both urban and rural Vietnamese in their free time. Children watch TV at home or go to their neighbors if their families cannot afford a TV set. They like watching TV because the programs have been improved and diversified toward educational target. Besides programs for children including films, and circus shows, there are plenty of educational programs, teaching foreign languages, popularising knowledge and interesting games.

Children's demand for books and newspapers to read in their free time is quite high. Our findings show that 32 % of the interviewees say they read books and newspapers everyday; 42.5 % do it irregularly and only 13 % don't read books and newspapers. However, the regular readers are mainly in Hanoi as rural people have little access to books and newspapers. They run short of books and newspapers in both types and copies. The head of La Son communal cultural post office said he had only 200 books, all of which have been borrowed by children in his commune. He cannot buy more books because their prices are very high.



Note: 1 – watch TV; 2 – listen to radio; 3 – read books and newspapers; 4 – play sports; 5 – play computer games; 6 – play with friends; 7 – sleep; 8 – other activities.

a –daily; b – sometimes; c – don't do; d –No answer

It is worthwhile to note that the rate of children participating in daily sports activities is low; only > 20 %, and > 40 % play sometimes. It is not because they don't like sports but because they don't have sufficient possibilities. As mentioned above, urban children lack playgrounds and space while rural ones lack equipment and facilities. The mass media often warn that computer games are harmful to children. However, our findings show that only 3.8 % of the children play it everyday and 11.0 % sometimes. While computer games are becoming attractive to urban children, rural children usually cannot afford to pay for the games. To the poor children, going to a park or lake are cannot be afforded. For instance, the water park entrant ticket in West Lake (Hanoi) costs 50.000 dong per ticket for adults and 20.000 dong (slightly more than 1 dollar) per ticket for children. Moreover, there are not many games and activities for children in the rural and mountainous areas. Children often even do not have a ball to play. They have to make a ball from wrapping a cloth. La Son children said: 'we do not know what to do but going out to talk together, sometimes chasing to each other. It is kind of boring but we do not know how to do.'

Adults sometimes take objections to children playing. A twelve-year-old girl, a school drop-out in La Son commune, likes playing football:

Q: what do you do in your free time?

A: I go around the village chatting with friends.

Q: Anything else?

A: Watch football match on TV.

Q: Do you play football?

A: Yes. I play with seven other girls at the communal yard in the evening, not with the boys. Thuy's mother said we were girls but that we are playing football. She called it a shame. Many others also criticized us.

In the eyes of these parents, football is exclusive for boys. Girls, especially at the age between 9 -16 should only do traditional activities such as farming, housework, cooking, embroidery and lacework, preparing to get marriage and fulfilling the role of a wife, and a mother which the society and family deem it their tasks since time immemorial. Now these 7 girls have to play football far from home late at night to avoid criticism. Obviously, adults' inappropriate views have limited their children's playing activities. It not only reflects the deepening generation gap in Vietnam but also aborts many talents and legitimate aspirations of the children.

Similarly, parents don't always agree with boys' games, which are sometimes mischievous. They think the boys are bothering them and instead of understanding or guiding them they use the right of parents to scold and beat them. The results of the interviewing parents in Quang Son showed that some parents were not pleased with boys during the mid-day since that for adults is the time to rest. They make noises and quarrel so that the adults cannot take a nap and become angry. We registered stories of children even hit by their parents when they play in the afternoon and make noises. This is the reason why they have to move their playing ground to the rice field or to the forest border.

'We only play games while tending buffaloes in the fields away from home. It is because if we had quarrel, parents would scold and sometimes beat us.'
(Interview with a group of boys in Quang Son)

From the many examples of the use of free time by boys and girls we have selected two cases as illustration. The following are activities in a day of an 11-year-old schoolboy at grade 7 in Quang Son commune; and a 14-year-old girl, school drop-out, in La Son.

Table 5.3: A day of an 11-year-old schoolboy, Trieu Van G. in Quang Son commune (November 2, 2001)

Time		Activities
6.00 hrs		Get up
6.00 – 6.10	10'	Personal hygiene
6.10 – 6.35	25'	Playing with his nephew (son of his older sister). He doesn't have breakfast. His family members don't have breakfast together.
6.35 – 11.30	5 hours	At school
11.30 – 12.00	30'	Lunch
12.00 – 13.20	1 hour and a half	Watch TV at his uncle's house next door
13.20 – 13.30	10'	Stay at home
13.30 – 13.45	15'	Lead the buffalo to graze near his house
13.45 – 14.30	45'	Playing around his house
14.30 – 14.40	10'	Lead the buffalo to graze in other place
14.40 – 15.30	50'	Play with friends in the neighborhood (joking, climbing trees, fighting)
15.30 – 15.45	15'	Lead the buffalo to graze in other place
15.45 – 17.00	1 hour and 15'	Play with friends in the neighborhood
17.00 – 17.15	15'	Lead the buffalo home
17.15 – 17.40	25'	Gather rice during in the yard into jute bags
17.40 – 18.10	30'	Prepare dinner
18.10 – 18.30	20'	Watch TV at home
18.30 – 18.55	25'	Have a bath, wash clothes
18.55 – 19.15	20'	Play around the home
19.15 – 19.35	20'	Have dinner
19.35 – 20.45	1 hour and 10'	Do home exercises
20.45 – 22.15	1 hour and a half	Watch TV at his uncle's house
22.20		Go to bed

Trieu Van G. does housework voluntarily without coercion. His work is light and simple, suitable to his age. He is a schoolboy but spends too much time on playing (7 hrs/ day) during school-year. He only plays with children in the neighborhood and their games are monotonous, not diverse. At school, he always teases his classmates, usually pushing and fighting each other. He spends little time on study, just more than 1 hour in the evening.

Table 5.4: A day of 14-year-old girl Dinh Thi L., school drop-out in La Son (October 28, 2001, a harvest day)

Time		Activities
5.30		Get up
5.30 – 5.40	10'	Personal hygiene
5.40 – 5.50	10'	Have breakfast (a bowl of cool rice and fish sauce)
5.50 – 6.00	10'	Play with little younger brother in bed
6.00 – 6.05	5'	Sit in the kitchen
6.05 – 6.30	25'	Put rice husk in jute bags (for potato planting)
6.30 – 7.00	30'	Wash younger brother's clothes in the pond (very dirty water)
7.00 – 7.10	10'	Prepare tools to reap rice (jute bags, sickle)
7.10 – 12.30	5 hours and 20'	Harvest rice with mother and 5 helpers.
12.30		Going home
12.30 – 13.15	45'	Wash and have lunch (with meat for the helpers)
13.15 – 13.30	15'	Rest (silently on the verandah)
13.30 – 14.00	30'	Call to grandma's house
14.00 – 17.00	3 hours	Harvest rice
17.00 – 18.00	1 hour	Have a bath and wash clothes
18.00 – 18.35	35'	Have dinner with family
18.35 – 18.50	15'	Wash dishes
18.50 – 19.00	10'	Rest (massage foot and legs)
19.00 – 21.00	2 hours	Help mother sieve rice
21.00		Go to bed

L's family is very poor with no property. Her dilapidated house is made of earth with thatched roof. In rainy days, it is leaked everywhere. The house is in a mess and very dirty. She does not have a hygienic lifestyle. She often drinks unboiled water from the tank. L. has to do hard and heavy work against her age such as to harvest rice. Although she already dropped school, she has very little free time, only about 1 hour and 10 minutes a day, and activities she does in her free time

are monotonous. Furthermore, she is always scolded by her mother as lazy and slow, good for nothing, and often complaining while working.

Comparing the two children, we can see the girl is more disadvantaged. We do not intend to say that all girls are worse than boys, or that all girls have to work as hard as this one. It is worth noting, however, that most of school drop-outs are girls, and that these girls include some who performed well at school. In needy families, which usually are also families with lowly educated parents, girls are not always well cared for. These parents are only concerned with their daughters as the daughters can help much in farm and housework. As a saying goes, 'Fertile field and she-buffalo are not worth the eldest daughter'. They don't have time to be concerned with their daughters' leisure time. A plan is already made for the girls, namely to get marriage, to do farm work, to have babies and to rear them, and to serve her husband and his family. This may not be the majority of parents, but the tradition lingers on. It is no coincidence that the number of female truant students are from poor families. Truancy may also be caused by the inability of these parents to pay the tuition fee for all of their children, but the traditional attitude towards girls is also part of the problem, especially when parents have had a minimal level of education only. They consider it was sufficient for all the girls to have accomplished the junior secondary school.

According to the Vietnamese people's conception, parents are responsible to arrange their children's marriage. Parents are seriously concerned about getting their daughters' marriage arranged before they get 'too old to get marriage' or 'trot dai' (pregnancy before marriage). This psychology is still popular in the rural and mountainous areas, as is shown in the following interview (with Tran Van H. Quang in Son town):

Q: How many children have you got?

Interviewee: 8 children, 3 boys and 5 girls

Q: How is their education?

Interviewee: So-so, but I only allow my daughter to study until 7th form. Three of them got married already. Two others are like 'two bombs' in the family. I am very worry about them

Q: Why?

Interviewee: It may not surprised you. The rural and mountainous areas have many girls, many are too old to get married. None of the parents want to have 'ba co' (dead nubile girl) in the family.

Q: How about the boys?

Interviewee: They can keep studying as long as they can manage. Getting married is not so urgent for them.

Earlier, we have given several examples about the female students in the three researched areas who can study well but were forced by their families to discontinue education in order to work. There are also some good male students who had to stop studying because of poverty. However, this usually happened to be the case when the parents were absolutely poor. The parents are traditionally concerned about their son's career for their future and when they get old, they can rely on their children. Presently, however, most families seem to have changed their conception about encouraging intelligent children, whether they are boys or girls, to continue studying. We would like to cite two cases from interviewing parents in La Son.

-Now it is different, study is so hard and difficult, but both boys and girls who can study well will keep studying; the others are bad in studying must stay at home.

- In my family it is the same. Girls can study better than boys can, and my father said: 'We must try to find money to support all of you in your studies. Who does not want to study can stay at home and if their life is not good, they must not complain about their parents later'.

In these circumstance of either concentrating on school or on work, and sometimes on both, not much time is left for leisure activities. As Nguyen Thi L, a girl aged 12 from Phuc Xa ward, complained:

I wish that the workload in school be reduced so that we have a little more time to play. I am very tired, because after school I have to take extra classes.

5.4. Cultural and Leisure Activities

As we mentioned above, despite of the serious shortage of facilities and funds, the families and communities have held healthy entertainment and cultural and sport activities for children on festivals and summer holidays. The children have enthusiastically responded to these activities: 52 % of the children join sport activities and more than 54 % join excursions and picnics. However some activities are not attractive to children such as art performance and the Mid-Autumn Festival, which are disliked by 26 % and 18 % respectively. In reality, children's excitement depends much on how the entertainment activities are held. But at present they are poorly organized and their content and form are monotonous.

We have interviewed the leaders of children organisations in the three researched areas about the organizing activities for children during festivals and Tet holiday. They have organized games for children and the situation seems to be improving in recent years in the sense that there are more and more games being carried out, including sport competitions like bike racing, ping-pong, football, and badminton. They agree that such activities should be held more often, as stated by the secretary of Youth Union in Phuc Xa district: 'What we have been able to organize does not meet the demand because those kinds of games are not held

frequently. We are lacking of money and people to do this'. The organiser in charge of culture in La Son town said:

Here in our area, we often organized some activities for children to participate in such as going in march; wrestling, playing football, and playing shuttlecock. Children liked it very much and said games were too few.

Table 5.5: Children's participation in community entertainment activities.

		Just participating	Like It	Dislike	No answer
Mid-autumn Festival, International Children Day, June 1		67.9	18.2	4.7	9.1
Pioneer's activities, art performances, sports		51.9	26.1	10.4	11.6
Camping, picnic, excursion		54.4	28.3	6.0	11.6

Children of course like these festivals and Tet holiday. A group of female students in La Son said:

We very much like taking part in games for children in the Mid-August festival. In school, sometimes, our teachers also hold those games. Normally, during break time, we only play skipping over a rope or playing drag on. We play on our own. When we are at home, we can only play during the weekend and holiday and we are very busy during the week

Doing public service and helping disadvantaged families are activities highly educational for children. As many as 46.5 % of the children take part in such works activities and 30.2 % in helping disadvantaged families and children. These activities help improve their responsibility to the community, and care for others who have suffered bad luck. It is considered an educational way of forming the child's character.

Table 5.6. Children's participation in social and voluntary activities

Vocational training	6.6 %
Public service, collect garbage	46.5 %
Help disadvantaged families and children	30.2 %
Other activities	12.6 %

The table shows diverse social activities have been organized and attracted a large number of children. The children have actively responded to these work. They initiate creative ideas for specific activities through discussion with people in charge. 42.1 % of the children said they have made proposals and discussed with the people in charge. These activities have been encouraged in many provinces and attracted a lot of children.

In recent years, the Ho Chi Minh Communist Youth Union and The Pioneer Teenager Group have started a thanksgiving campaign in honour of the veterans and heroes and the families had helped in the revolution. Many families are remaining poor because of loosing their main work force. The local government and companies have built houses for free for those poor families, and children in the community are being allotted tasks to help in the household and to take care of patient or collect clothes, books, and notebooks to donate to those families. Presently, this work has been widening to the disabled children and the victims of the Orange poison gas during the war, to children from the very poor families or from families suffering from natural disaster. For this matter, said Nguyen Van T in Quang Son village:

My school is carrying out some activities of collecting waste paper, and metal. The money from that collection is used to distribute to the families in Dong Thap which were seriously affected by floods. Last years, our group collected 300.000 dong. I saw children on the TV who had died or who had to stop studying; I am very sorry for that. I really like taking part in this activity in school.

Some other children had the following activities to report:

I also joined in the activity to support Cuba. I volunteer to reduce my little fund of pocket money for breakfast to contribute together with my friends (Tran Thi Th in Phuc Xa).

My house is next to H. H and his two brothers are disabled children. It is very difficult for three of them to go to school. Sometimes, I ask X and K to visit H's family to cook for him in order to save his time to study (Pham Thi V, La Son town).

We like to take part in programs that support people in needs. We sometimes face difficulties, too. That is why we understand their needs (a group of female students in La Son commune).

6. Drug addiction and AIDS

Most of the children are aware that drug addition is harmful and are determined to stay away from this social evil. The number of children addicted to drugs and involved in drug trafficking is on the rise in Vietnam. However, as we presented earlier, drug use varies regionally. Phuc Xa ward is one of hot spots of drug abuse in Hanoi, while La Son commune finds no drug addict. Some people in Quang

Son are opium addicts. It is safe to say that some rural areas in Vietnam still lead a healthy and simple life, which is not yet influenced by the urban complicated lifestyle. Almost 10 % of the child interviewees answered that they had seen some of their your friends (schoolmates or neighbors) inhale, smoke or inject drugs. These children are in Hanoi where this social evil is raging.

How do the children respond to these cases? 29 % say they will report to teachers or the addict's family; 38.7 % will persuade the friend to get rid of drugs; 29 % say 'it is up to him to decide, I have no intervention', and 3.2 % do not know what to do. So, the number of children with positively attitude makes up a high proportion. It shows that most of them have been aware of the harmful narcotic drugs and their responsibility to prevent it. Those who say they don't want to intervene are either indifferent or don't fully understand this social evil. With these attitudes, these children can be considered a high-risk group in the fight against drugs.

In-depth interviews and group interviews provide very little information of drug addiction among children. Most of the child interviewees say they have not seen any addicts at school, but all affirm that drug addiction is very bad and should be avoided. They received information mainly from TV and other mass media, then from their school and family. Children in Hanoi have deeper understanding about drugs than those in rural areas. It is easy to explain, because Hanoi is at higher risk and is the focus of drug prevention and control programs. Parents are very concerned with this issue, as they told is in Phuc Xa:

We always tell our children to keep away from drugs. The school also educates them about it. There are many drug addicts in our living quarter. I wonder why parents all teach them that drugs are harmful, but their children are still addicted. Normally they are jobless. Households with many children fail to control them.

Our findings show that 89.8 % of the child interviewees say they heard about HIV/AIDS and know it is very dangerous. Many of them are aware of its transmission tracks. This fact shows positive results of Vietnam's relevant communication over the last few years. A 14-year-old girl in Quang Son said:

I know about AIDS through TV. There are no such patients in our village. We are afraid of being transmitted very much, particularly having injection or tooth-care.

Many parents, for example these parents in Phuc Xa said:

The children understand about HIV better than their parents. They know about it through TV. Currently, the mass media talks about it all day long.

However, there remain 10.2 % of the child interviewees who don't know about HIV/AIDS. Among them, around one third are from Ha Noi, and 40.6 % from Thai Nguyen. So the rate of children from Thai Nguyen who don't know about HIV/AIDS is higher than that of Ha Noi and Ha Nam. It is easy to understand as Thai Nguyen is a mountainous area, which is inaccessible by traffic, and communication is therefore, not as updated as in the plain and urban areas. Over

the last few years, the mass media in Vietnam have disseminated information on this issue, but TV remains the most popular. However, it is not easy for people in mountainous areas such as Thai Nguyen, particularly ethnic minority households to afford a TV set. Meanwhile, newspapers are not available and cannot reach remote villages. Children from Thai Nguyen thus cannot access relevant information in the same way as those from Ha Noi and Ha Nam. However, it is surprising that the rate of children who do not know about HIV/AIDS is higher in Hanoi than in Ha Nam and Thai Nhuyen. It might be that these children are from impoverished households who have just migrated to the capital city. As their households are too poor, the children have no access to any mass media. Anyhow, it is an important indicator for researchers and social activists.

7. Children's Awareness about Their Rights

With constant amendments and revisions, Vietnam's legal system has clearly affirmed the rights of the child. The laws have been enforced to improve people's awareness of caring for, protecting and educating children. Vietnam is among the countries which signed and ratified the International Convention on the Rights of the Child very early. The State is trying to make Vietnam's legal system and policies harmonize with that Convention. The mass media, authorities and social organizations have regularly disseminated the content of this Convention to the public.

Over the last few years, authorities at all levels, social and mass organizations, the communities and families have been more aware of children's rights. Our researchers tried to find out parents' awareness of the two important documents, namely the International Convention on the Rights of the Child, and Vietnam's Law on the Protection, Care and Education of Children.

Nearly half of the interviewed parents said they knew about the International Convention on the Rights of the Child, and Vietnam's Law on the Protection, Care and Education of Children.

Findings show 40.3 % of the parents we interviewed said they knew about the International Convention on the Rights of the Child, and 35.1 % knew about Vietnam's Law on the Protection, Care and Education of Children. It can be considered an initial success in communicating legal matters relating to the protection, care and education of children. Parents might hear or read about the documents through mass media, but very few make efforts to have a deep understanding of them. They trust the government and depend the State to act and implement the convention. They do not think that it is also their responsibilities as parents to work with the State and other social organizations to ensure child rights.

The parents have come to know of the child rights' documents through the following channels (see table 5.7). Most of people know about these two legal documents through TV programs. In Vietnam, more rural people listen to the radio than urban ones as a public address system is available in every commune.

Poor households, who cannot afford a TV set, try to buy a radio set to listen to news. Urban people have access to a wider range of mass media, and newspapers and TV are the most popular.

Table 5.7. Channels providing parents with legal knowledge

	UN Convention on the Rights of the Child	Vietnam Law on the Protection, Care and Education of Children
Listen to radio	53.6	54
Watching TV	74.5	78
Reading newspapers	40	24.5

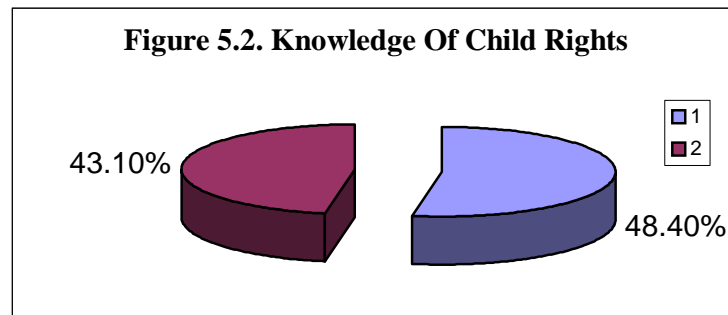
Comparison of parents' education levels shows the higher education they are, the more they understand about these two legal documents.

The Table shows that 100 % of parents having tertiary education know about the Convention and the Law, while only 17 % of the parents with primary education know about these two legal documents. However, when our researchers asked about specific provisions and articles of these legal documents, even the highly-educated parents gave very vague answers. It means that even parents are not really concerned with their children's rights and the enforcement of these rights. The situation is worse among parents having primary and lower secondary education. They not only mix up the Convention with the Law, but also have a limited understanding of their meaning. Some parents in La Son said:

Children have the right to watch TV and listen to the radio. People are not allowed to repress them or be hostile against them. The children go to school and are taught by their teachers. We are working in the fields, we don't know much. Here we have a different understanding about laws on children from urban people. We depend on the State and authorities in inform us how we should approach the children and correct our ways.

Surprisingly, more parents from Thai Nguyen (around one half) know about these two legal documents compared to those in Ha Noi and Nam Ha (around one fourth). It shows that knowledge of laws on children not only depends on the access to communication channels, but also on parents' sense of responsibility to the care and education of their children, which thus may be higher in the more remote areas where the efforts to develop and close the gap with the more developed areas may lead to more stimulation of the children do to well and study hard. Some people who are in charge of care for children said that they focus on programs to ensure child rights more than on awareness raising, because the State has already launched an extensive communication program on child rights and schools have implemented educational activities about the matter.

Figure 5.2. The proportion of children knowing about the International Convention and the Law

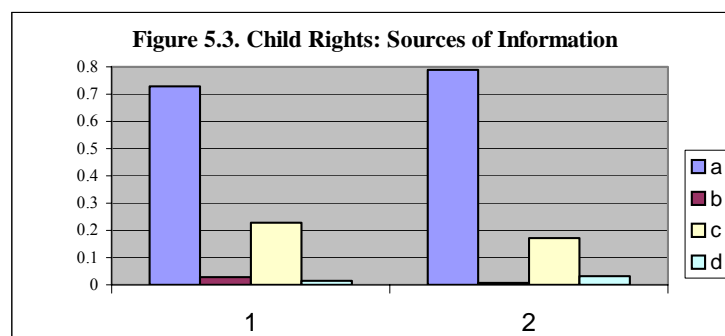


Note: 1 – Knowledge of UN Convention; 2 – Knowledge of Vietnam’s Law on the Protection, Care and Education of Children.

The number of children knowing about the Convention and the Law is higher than that of parents: 48.4 % of the child interviewees said they knew about the International Convention on the Rights of the Child, and 43.1 % understand Vietnam’s Law. Among the knowledgeable children, many know about both legal documents. Comparing with their parents, we see that more children understand these documents than their parents. It shows that the children learn legal matters from school and they initially try to know about their basic rights through legal documents.

The children receive information on their rights from the following channels: 72.8 % through the mass media; 22.8 % from the school; 2.9 % from friends; and 1.5 % from other people. Similar percentages apply to the knowledge of the Vietnamese law. Significantly, we do not find the direct role played by local authorities and social and mass organizations operating in the field of child protection, care and education in helping to improve children’s knowledge of these important legal documents.

Figure 5.3. Communication Channels Providing Knowledge of Child Rights



Note: a – the mass media; b – friends; c – the school; d – other people.

Regional differences are not pronounced, but surprisingly Ha Noi children make up the lowest percentages among these knowledgeable children. However, similar to their parents, the children do not understand these legal documents thoroughly, as this example shows:

A group of girls in Phuc Xa: The rights of the child? Yes, we heard about them over the TV. We are not taught at school, just listen to the TV. Children's rights mean children have the right to live, the right to be cared for and the right to play.

A group of boys in La Son: We know about the rights of the child through the textbook on civil education, and TV. The Law on the Protection of Children says children have the right to be cared for, children are the country's future.

Their answers show that one of the important rights that they feel easy to identify is: 'The State and society respect children's rights, and protect their life, body, dignity and honor.' Although their understanding is not complete, it is an initial background for them to protect themselves and require adults to respect and protect them.

Our findings also show that nowadays children are more active and self-confident in life. They actively participate in family and social affairs sometimes react against mechanical and stiff ideas imposed on them by adults. Asked whether they 'propose any initiative for your family and community affairs?', 39.1 % said yes, and 60.9 % said no.

These answers show the rate of active children is rather high. We found that children take initiatives mostly in the family context. They give their opinions to parents regarding family work and issues. However, at school and community, they only express their ideas when they are asked to do so. Since awareness of child rights has been improved recently, some local governments and schools have started involving children in consultation process regarding plans and programs that relate to them. For example, children contribute their ideas to campaigns such as "Tran Quoc Toan", who is a child-hero in Vietnamese history. This campaign aims at helping people with disabilities, the elderly and families of war martyrs and invalids. Another example is the campaign of young advocates. The Teams of Young Advocates raise awareness about programs launched by local governments and schools to keep the environment green and clean. A group of male students in La Son commune communicated the following examples:

- All members of our school's Young Pioneer Brigade participate in the Tran Quoc Toan campaign. We have supported 22 families since last year.
- As members of the Team of Young Advocates, we participate in cleaning our neighborhood and village at weekends and holidays. Our team holds

meetings to plan these activities and show our plans to our leader. He gives his comments and then we start implementing our activities.

-We took initiatives in organizing this activity. We enjoyed doing it so much. Our villagers also respect us. Everybody praised us.

These activities come close to the involvement of agency ('chungse') whereby children themselves develop initiatives, albeit within a format that has been provided by the adults.

Vietnam is influenced by Confucianism, which set up a very strict and severe family and social structure. Under Confucianism, women and children are the inferiors who should be educated. They have no right to discuss or decide important family affairs, even relating to their future. According to Confucius, children must absolutely obey their parents. Parents have the right to scold and beat their children to 'educate' them, so do husbands against their wives. Currently, the husband's 'right' to beat his wife is eliminated by law and is strongly protested against by the women and progressive movements. Meanwhile, parents' 'right' to beat their children in the name of 'education', seems to be still acknowledged by public opinion, traditional customs and practices.

At present, many parents still think that it is necessary to give mal-treatment, beating or brutal punishment against children. They beat their children if the children commit a mistake. They beat their children when they are angry or worry making a living, or when they are not happy with family or social relations. A slap or a blow regularly occurred in the family is considered legal. Only serious violation which causes child injuries, disabilities, or death will be punished by law.

To find out violence against children, we put the question to the children whether they had been beaten by other people. As many as 82.4 % of the child interviewees said they were scolded and beaten. It shows that scolding and beating children remain a popular practice in both urban and rural areas, and is still considered an effective education method. Even as many as 67.4 % of the interviewed children say they are beaten by their parents. Others are beaten by relatives, and even by school teachers.. So we can see that this negative 'traditional education method' is more widely practiced in rural than urban areas: 26.3 % of the beaten children are from Ha Noi, 35.5 % are from Ha Nam, and 38.2 % from Thai Nguyen.

One girl said:

I fear my father most. Each time he beats me I feel as if my skin were peeled off. I scare of my elder brother very much because he often beats me and I feel very painful.

Most of the parents also acknowledged this situation. Parents in La Son and Quang Son stated:

Yes, I do beat them when they are insolent and stubborn. Only when they are scolded and beaten, they will be frightened.

When they are scolded and beaten they keep silent and work. If we don't scold them they will be lazy and do nothing.

Some children become stubborn and obstinate after being scolded many times.

Sometimes they are beaten but victim of injustice. Then as time elapse we all forget about it. I don't think parents should ask their children for forgiveness.

We should be more careful in educating daughters. We should scold and beat them to make them mature.

Gender does not appear to be a discriminating factor. However, schoolgirls are more advantaged than boys. Schoolboys often subject to teachers' scolding, beating and discipline. To understand about this matter, we interviewed the schoolteachers and schoolchildren themselves. Findings show schoolgirls in the three areas are praised by teachers as hard learning, hard working, more docile and less breaking disciplines.

In my school, boys perform well in learning (60 %), better than girls. It is because at the age of lower secondary school, girls have to do more housework than boys. The girls work very hard. They have to uproot rice seedlings and transplant rice, and have no time to learn. In fact the girls are more potential than boys and are not so engrossed in playing as boys.

The Headmaster of Quang Son lower secondary school, Mr. Dam Van C. said:

In my school, girls' learning performance is better (65 %) than boys. The girls learn very quickly in class. At home they have to work harder than boys who are more engrossed in playing. The buffalo girls take textbooks with them to learn, while the buffalo boys don't. However, parents often ask their daughters to drop out when they go to upper secondary school because the school is far from home.

Interviews with schoolchildren also show a better relationship between teachers with schoolgirls than with boys. We were often told by the girls, like this group of 12 to 13-year-old girls in Phuc Xa commune that 'in class, girls are doing better, because they learn harder and more concentrate on the lecture. The boys are lazier and play football very often. Although some boys are learning well, many others are lazy.' They themselves were sometimes scolded, but they were never beaten:

A: Our teachers only scold or remind us. Sometimes they call us to a private corner to remind us of our mistakes.

A: I was beaten at primary school, but now not.

Q: What disciplines do you prefer?

A: In general, to be reminded.

Q: What mistake do you usually make?

A: Leaving books and notebooks at home, and gossiping.

Schoolgirls in La Son commune also affirmed not to be beaten by their teachers. They were just reminded, criticized, had their names noted in the teacher's check-book or asked to write self-criticism. Boys were more interested in this topic. All members of the boys' group said they had been beaten at least once by the teacher, as a group of schoolboys aged between 13 – 16 in La Son told us:

That day I came late. My teacher noted my name in her check-book. I snatched the book from her, and she slapped me in the face. I felt buzzed in the ears.

We played football and came in class late. My teacher called each of us in and slapped in our faces.

The child whose names is in the check-book was slapped 3 times. Our teacher asked the group leader to slap us.

Our teacher N. even forced me to kneel on the rock, until the skin on my knee was abraded.

In addition to this, some teachers even resorted to strong language in scolding the boys, or gave punishments such as forcing them to stand on the classroom corner for the whole day, or giving them bad marks. Most of schoolboys are full of pent-up anger for this too severe treatment.

Life nowadays is diverse and complicated while children are not fully aware of things. They often act as they wish and by instinct but do not understand much about values and criteria. Particularly now that parents or other adults are too busy making a living, the time they spend on their children become very limited. Some parents cannot speak with their children for the whole week, as they go to work when their children are still sleeping and come back home only when the children are already gone to bed.

The poor sentimental and spiritual life is one important reasons leading to a generation gap. Adults often impose their viewpoint on evaluating children's actions, so the children are often charged with 'mistakes'. Instead of giving advise and explanation, they resort to scolding and beating to threaten the children and force them to do as they want. That is why when the children are beaten, they often think that they are victims of an injustice and have pent-up anger for a long time. Quite a few children have left their home or even committed suicide to punish their parents. This negative thinking sometimes leads to serious consequences, which can never be corrected. Schoolteachers are forbidden to beat students as this act is anti-pedagogic, but in reality some teachers still break the law.

8. The future in the eyes of children

Our investigation shows the children's aspiration and view of their future are very simple and realistic to their daily lives. It shows that their living conditions remain poor and simple, and the children's awareness can not go beyond their daily living environment.

Answering the question whether they are satisfied with their current living conditions, most of the school dropouts said 'No'. The schoolchildren said that their conditions were 'acceptable', but not many of them were satisfied. Most of them say it is because their families are too poor, and poor living conditions prevent them from learning and playing. Proceeding from this situation, they all wish that their parents have stable jobs and income, and their family is prosperous, harmonious and happy. Furthermore, rural children hope that all villagers will become rich and they love and help each other to build a peaceful life. Two girls in La Son said: 'I wish most to have a well-off, happy, and harmonious family, in which brothers and sisters love, help and take care of one another', and 'I also wish my villagers become prosperous and rich, and assist one another.'

Tran Van T (16 years old) has a kidney problem and has dropped out from school in La Son commune. About his future, he had this to say:

Q: What wishes do you have about the future of your family and your future?

A: I wish that my mother's health will improve, my sister will recover from joint disease and my kidney problem will improve. If I am healthy, I can work and take care of my mother and my sister so that my mother doesn't have to sell breads anymore.

Tran Van D, a boy aged 15 from Quang Son commune, wanted to leave the countryside:

I wish that after finishing school I will find a job and leave the countryside, so that I won't have to work on the field. Farming is a very hard work that produces little money. Processing and carving stone is not only hard, but also dangerous.

The dreams of the children are very specific. A 15-year-old schoolgirl who performs well at class 9 in Phuc Xa said: 'I wish to have my house repaired and enlarged, to have a bed to sleep on, and my father will get a job to have more income. I wish my brothers, sisters and I will continue going to school. I hope for assistance from the ward.'

Most of children wish for no violence in their families. They hope their parents change their conduct towards each other and change their viewpoint towards them, respect their rights and don't scold or beat them. They wish their parents give advice and explanation when they make a mistake to make them further understand the matter: 'I like most when my parents bring me joy, and feel most uncomfortable when they shout and scold at me,' said a 14-year-old boy in La Son.

Most of the children wish to continue schooling and have good performances. The dropouts wish to resume school, while schoolchildren are worrying that they will have to quit school at any time. They all wish that their families and school create an opportunity for them to learn. Many schoolchildren give comments on the current teaching and learning quality and conditions and wish for an educational reform. A group of girls in Phuc Xa stated:

We only wish that the school have more learning aid and the lessons are not too condensed. We hope for a large schoolyard and more sporting rooms. During the break, the yard is overcrowded. We can not move and sometimes the boys crash into us. In the past the school *Cozy Roof May 19* had a slide and seesaw, but they are all damaged, nothing remains now.

Another schoolboy, studying in grade 9 in Quang Son said:

I only wish that the schoolyard is even, not having many sharp rocks as now so that we can play comfortably. Many of us fell down, their knees were injured, and their toe's nails were lost. These friends could recover only after many days.

Two girls in La Son said h my teacher speak slower and more interesting and my friends keep silent so that I can concentrate.'

I like most to play comfortably, and to have the feeling that children from poor households are also taken cared of and have education

From the boys in La Son we heard the following comments:

I wish that when we make a mistake, our teachers don't scold or beat but give us advise, and only punish those who repeat the same mistake.

I wish the school organize football, badminton and chess courses.

I propose that the school provide drinking water, allow us to switch on the electric fan, and employ a cleaner.

The Pioneer Brigade operating in my school does not organize any entertainment activities but is only concerned with political matters. We wish that the brigade come closer to us.

We hope that the commune build for each village a small ground for football, badminton, table tennis and chess, organize sanitation days to clear the environment, and give strict punishment to those who fight and heaping abuse on each other.

The children also said they wanted to find a good job when they grow up to make a living and help their family. Ideal jobs for both boys and girls are teacher, doctor, singer, worker, scientist, and footballer. Many girls also want to become footballers. Some children know what they want do do in the future, like one boy who said he wanted to study law and work as a lawyer because farmers need laws.' However, many children cannot imagine of their future jobs, particularly school dropouts, like this 13-year-old girl in La Son, illiterate as she dropped out from grade 2: 'There is nothing to do in the village and I only want to go away from home to find a job. I still don't know what I shall do later, anything will do. Similarly, a 16-year-old drop-out boy in La Son boy told us: 'I cannot find any job here, I only want to go to the city to find a job.' Staying home to take care of a younger brother or sister is one option that we encountered a number of times, especially with drop-out children who complained that they could not continue studying 'because my parents have no money to pay for school fee'.

Most of the interviewed children cannot think and define their role in the future of their families and communities yet. They often answered ‘don’t know’, or ‘normal’. On the one hand it is because of their inferiority at present when they are being brought up and educated by the family and society so they have not sufficient self-reliance to affirm their future position. And on the other hand, their parents, schoolteachers and other adults do not create a favorable condition for them to realize their rights as defined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Law on the Protection, Care and Education of Children. In such situation, the children, particularly those from needy families, don’t know how to obtain a worthy role in their family and community.

We finally give some more stray thoughts on how children see the future of themselves and of society. There are other responses, such as:

- I saw on TV that there are wars and disasters in many places. So many people have died because of that. I wish that in the future we won’t have terrible things like wars and disasters.
- I want to become a policeman to fight against crime and drug. Crime and drug are bad for society.
- I want to become a singer. I will sing songs to make people love each other more and stop fighting.
- When we become adults, we will do a lot to help our village.

Through meeting with these children, we have learned that they love their families and communities. They want to learn and gain knowledge to make their families and communities more prosperous and healthy. This is resulted from Vietnam’s education program that teaches children to love their homeland and country and to love “others as oneself”. This is also a combination of Marxism and nationalism. Their solution of social and economic problems is seen through the prism of love, harmony and solidarity.

Conclusion

From a research on the life of children, their education, work, and other activities, their needs and aspirations, particularly those from poor households at the project sites, we can see clearer the importance of the care and education of children in Vietnam at present. Improving the quality and effectiveness of these activities will make a positive contribution to the development of younger human resources to serve the national industrialization and modernization process.

Currently Vietnam is more advantaged in promoting the care, leisure activities and education of children. The State has always considered the care and education of children as one of the most important tasks of the country. The responsibility of the state provides a legal basis for the promotion of these activities. More investment has poured into education. More schools are built and consolidated in all provinces and cities. Vocational and job training schools have been expanded and developed. And authorities from all parts of the country have constructed

youth clubs and cultural houses to provide children and young people with more entertainment opportunities to improve their cultural lives.

Nowadays, children are brought up and educated in a new environment. They have opportunities to contact and integrate in the outside world so they become more self-confident and active in life. Their dynamism and ability to access new knowledge make their chances of development more favorable.

However, the care and education of children in Vietnam is meeting with quite a few difficulties and obstacles, both objectively and subjectively. Over the last few years, the State has issued and enforced many policies relating to children, but in general, many constraints remain and new restraints have been added. The delegation of responsibilities between different ministries, branches, authorities and social and mass organizations to the care and education of children is not specific and fails to meet their needs. In addition to this, many complicated issues have emerged and developed, affecting the children's knowledge and behaviors. For example, the polarization between the rich and the poor, the gap between rural and urban areas, poverty, unemployment, speculation, corruption, social and family crisis, drugs, prostitution, gambling, drinking, and trafficking in women and children, all have a direct impact on their immature perception and knowledge.

We have presented children's opinions about social issues on the basis of in-depth interviews and group discussions. Generally speaking, children in the 3 research areas are aware of the dangers of social problems. With pure minds, children only want to look for goodness and kindness. They hate evils that exist in society. They do not want themselves or their families to be affected by the social problems. Parents also are worried about social problems and they try to find ways to educate and prevent their children from getting into trouble. But it is also realized that, children who unfortunately have to leave their family at a young age to earn a living are vulnerable and it is hard for them to protect their innocence.

The market economy with its strict competitive laws always draws the families and society into competitive economic activities. People, particularly parents and grand-parents, have not much time to take care and educate their children and grand-children. It is a reason why many children fall into the trap of social evils.

In Vietnam, all material and human resources should be tapped to provide good care and education to the children. The resources include facilities, funds, and staff. We should expand our scope of activities, provide further training to improve the quality of full-time staff and create favorable conditions for all social organization and individuals to contribute their knowledge and finance to these activities. These resources should be used logically and effectively, to create an integrated strength and avoid overlapping, or even obstructing each other.

6. General Conclusion

Vietnam is a country, which culturally has been shaped by the effects of Confucianism. The people in the family are divided into two types of people: 'Sõ' and 'Sù'. Sõ is grandfather, father, husband, and elder brothers. These people are responsible for managing and control the family and educate others. Sù is under the control and educated by Sõ. They are nephew, niece, children, wife, younger brothers and sisters. Due to this system, women and children belong to Sù. They do not have the right to make decision either in their own family or for themselves. Today, thanks to the socialist government's policies, there are many important changes among which one is that children and women's rights are more and more respected. However, the remnants of the backward Confucian ideology still persists within the family and in social patterns norms, especially in rural and mountainous areas. This matter is one of the great obstacles in the implement of child agency in the march forward. It is extremely difficult to overcome and change, the worldview and way of life, which existed for a thousand years. Our research results have reflected on the social situation in the researched areas and on institutions that contribute to changes in the coming time.

Vietnam very early on has signed the International Convention of Child Rights because all the articles of the Convention are suitable to the standpoint and development ideology in Vietnam. Nowadays, the government and people are step by step are trying to implement child rights because it is considered a foundation to develop the agency of children in the family and in society.

In the short term, we are building and completing the national law for children in accordance with the International Convention. It means the basic rights for children in the International Convention are studied and transformed to some articles of National Law. From 1992 to 1999, Vietnam has introduced about 13 laws and 120-regulation document related to children. The Law of Protection, Care and Education for children was issued right after the government approved the convention. It covered the full basic rights for children as mentioned in the Convention. And then, the national action program for children in 1991-2000 gave the target for children in the socio-economic strategic development with 4 of priorities: *Health, Primary education, Care for spirit of life for children, Protection of children suffered from special difficult condition.*

Up to 2002, in all the provinces, in 70 % of the districts, and in 40% of towns and villages, action program for children have been initiated, such as: widespread vaccination, diarrhea and child disease protection, school medical program, disable children's rehabilitation program, etc. Various programs prepared by the educational ministry, such as the popularisation of primary education, the anti-illiteracy campaign, the development of education in the remote areas, upgrading infrastructure, training and educating program for disable children, etc. have been carried out. The pioneer's association belonged to Ho Chi Minh Communist Youth Union has coordinated with the National Committee for protection and care for Vietnamese children and UNICEF to build a model of child rights in

every province and child rights club at the pioneer's association. The local clubs has many attractive activities like: Love for Sciences, Young talent players, camping, and forum on children's right. These activities have helped children to express their own opinion and to understand their claim to agency. Besides, various others national programs of the government related to children have helped to improve children's living standard including: poverty-alleviation movement, employment, population and family planning, the elimination of social diseases, the prevention of HIV/AIDS, pure water and environmental hygiene, etc.

Children have benefited directly, leading to various positive results..

The number of children suffering from diseases, disablement and untimely death has been reduced remarkable and the number of illiterate children has also decreased.

Children now have a voice in the society and law, and the family the school and the community more and more respect their voice. Children themselves have recognized their rights in the society, and at the same time were educated about their responsibilities for families and society.

According to many people, children today are more intelligent than the past generation because of better living condition and information.

The communication about child rights in order to appeal to public opinion and to change awareness of the communities about children is very important in building a better society for children. The mass media are playing active role in propagating the messages, and the UN Child Rights Convention has been translated into Vietnamese and some other languages such as: Thai, H'mong, Ede, Bana. More than 6 Vietnamese million children have participated in the competition of studying about convention and Vietnamese law held by the National Committee for Protection and Care for Vietnamese children, the Ministry of Education and Training, the Ministry of Justice, and television and radio stations.

Every year, many action days for children have been organized on a national scale such as vaccination day, day for adults to take children to school, day for child nutrition, international day for children (1st June). One entire month is dedicated to child activities (from 30 May to 30 June) with various local and nation-wide activities. Beside the specialized and responsible cadres working for children, there is a network of social workers like volunteers, coordinators working under the control of the local authority. These groups of employees are often invited to participate in the training course to improve professional knowledge and skill and they are working better and better.

International cooperation also plays an important part in improving the spread of child rights. The Vietnam-UNICEF program is one of the 10 largest cooperation programs of UNICEF in the world. NGOs such as Plan International and Radda Banen have made much valuable support both in material and knowledge to local and national organizations in Vietnam.

However, the above effort of the Vietnamese people and government is only the first step to improve living standard and spirit to children. There are some great challenges need to be solved in the coming times are as followed:

- ✓ the number of malnourished children is still high. For instance, in 1998, the number of malnourished children under 5 years old was 39%. In 2002, this situation has not improved for the better,
- ✓ 1,2 million children of minority people from highland, poor and rural areas do not go to school,
- ✓ the matter of children's right is not carried out efficiently,
- ✓ the problems related to poor children, street children, children involved in illegal activities are not completely solved,
- ✓ activities like ill-treating, violation of human dignity, sexual harassment, prostitution, child smuggling, kidnapping or child abuse are happening and increasing in some areas,
- ✓ the local government and community's deficiency in efficient awareness building of the CRC should be rectified.

In general, we think that the research is of significance, because it has found issues and problems that need to be addressed in different localities. This makes it possible to propose recommendations to the State and to develop a better plan of actions for ensuring child rights.

